The Arrangement

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The Arrangement

by TigerPrawn

Summary

After divorce and death has touched their lives, Hannibal and Will meet at a coping with loss group. They find each other marginally interesting…

Notes

So gang. I started writing this one around Oct 2018 on my way home from FFT2, but I Miss You and Gethen ended up taking priority.
Finally ended up writing and posting it between Jan 2020 - July 2020 on my P*tron site. 17 chapters in all, around 55k words. I hope you all enjoy it!

This fic is complete and I'll be posting a new chapter every week or two, around other postings :)

Chapter 1

“Hannibal, I want a divorce.”

There was almost an ending lilt of an apology in her firm tone.

Almost.

Hannibal turned and sighed at the stern look on Bedelia’s face.

She leaned back against the kitchen counter, her arms folded. Her wine glass had been set aside on the counter, whilst he still held his by the stem as he placed down the used plate he had brought through from the dining room. A usual domestic scene altered forever by her words.

There was no use arguing, he knew. They had been clear about this and it would be unreasonable of him to fight her on it, as much as he wanted to.

Which he knew was unfair, but that didn't stop the desire. This had worked for so long, it was still hard for him to comprehend - he thought they'd been so happy. Bedelia certainly hadn't made any complaints, at least not until recently. Perhaps he should have seen this coming?

The occasional comments of 'not being free to-'. He was not an unattentive man, so perhaps he had missed these things because he hadn't wanted to accept them? As he thought back, there had been many times she had suggested they might start doing things apart - going to the opera on separate nights, generally indulging separate interests. She'd taken up yoga.

She talked about the teacher, Chiyoh, quite a bit.

Too much?

Hannibal reeled back through conversations they'd had, and realised they were rarely conversations - they were, what passed for with Bedelia as excited chatter on return from class. He thought she'd just enjoyed yoga.

"There's someone else isn't there?" Hannibal asked, not sure he really wanted the answer.

Five Months Later

Will hesitated on the steps of the community centre.

This was, of course, ridiculous. But he'd never hear the end of it from Bev if he didn't attend at least one meeting. And she was right. She'd told him so many time she wouldn't at all mind him using her as a shoulder to cry on, or to even if he talked endlessly about it in general. But he didn't, he didn't share his pain at all. Just snapped and got annoyed. She was his closest - his only - friend and if he wasn't careful his shitty behaviour would drive her away.

So for her sake, for the sake of their friendship, he would go to the help group she'd made him sign up to - *Coping with Loss and Moving On*.

Just the name of it made his lip curl into a snarl. But once she'd got him to admit how deeply Randall's death had affected him, how hard it still was to work through, then he had to give in to her pushing.

Of course it had affected him. Randall had been in his life almost a decade, they were practically inseparable. Even now, almost a year later, he found it hard to sleep. He missed the solid weight of him in the bed, missed having someone to talk to in a remote house that suddenly felt very lonely. They'd lived in their own bubble of long walks and fishing, an escape from the bustle of working in the city.

Will shook the thoughts and took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

"Don't be a dick, don't be a dick," he chanted to himself before stepping forward.

He should have opened his eyes before the step, rather than after, because then he would have seen the man he stepped on. He was dressed in a eccentrically fancy suit and Will automatically disliked him. He knew he shouldn't but there was something about people like that - enough money to flash around that he must have been born to it, likely he'd never worked a day in his life. Or worse was some sort of banker or stock trader.

Even so, he reminded himself, that didn't excuse the fact that Will had just nearly knocked the man off his feet in the middle of the street.

"Shit, sorry," Will winced, grabbing the man's arm to keep him up right.

A slight frown flashed over the man's expression for less than a moment, before the expression became unreadable and flat.

"Quite alright," the man answered in a thick European accent, though there was a chill to the tone that made Will certain that it wasn't at all alright. He suppressed a sneer, choosing instead to stuff his hands in his pockets and walk off - away from the community centre.

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"I couldn't do it."

"You're a fucker, Will Graham! You promised me."

Will winced. She was right and his excuse was so shitty he didn't even dare tell her that the reason he didn't go was because he hated people and had already made an ass of himself with some random guy in the street.

There was a chance she'd understand, usually. She knew well how hard it was for him. He wasn't easy with people. He talked it up as social anxiety, and maybe in some ways it was. But mostly he just… people were too hard to be around. There were only a few that he had ever let through his defences, and he could count those on one hand. Most of which were no longer around. In fact, it was just Bev now.

The thought of that filled him with regret. Disappointing, maybe even hurting, his only friend wasn't okay. "I'll go, to the next one, I will. I promise. This time I'll go."

He heard Bev huff out a sigh on the other end of the phone.

"Okay, Will. We'll see." She muttered sounding as though she really doubted it.

That stung. He wasn't someone who let people down usually. But he did get why she had no patience or expectation with this. He had to do this, not just pay it lip service. He had worn her down with this and he knew it. She had been his only support after Randall died and that was too much for any one person.

"I'll come to yours after and tell you all about it," Will pushed.

"Let's not go that far," Bev replied, he could hear the smile in her words. "I don't need a blow by blow… unless of course something interesting happens."

He knew by interesting she meant drama or something equally entertaining and gossip worthy. She was never cruel or spiteful, but she was a gossip and always enjoyed hearing about complete strangers and the adventures they had.

"Sure, Bev," he smiled.

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Hannibal took a deep breath. The first week hadn't exactly been enjoyable but it had made him realise that, indeed, this group was something he'd needed to do. Despite almost being concussed prior to arrival, he had gone ahead and attended the group he had seen advertised.

It was as tedious as he expected. Really, as a therapist, he'd argued with himself for a long time that he didn't need this. And in the end he had decided to attend in favour of keeping up appearances.

The break up had been hard enough, but for Bedelia to take up, almost immediately with the yoga instructor, things had become worse. He was the subject of gossip now and their social circle, despite the split initially being amicable, were taking sides. Going to a group like this highlighted him as the wounded party and he wasn't above the manipulation in that, nor the drama of it.

Hannibal took a seat in the circle of chairs as everyone else helped themselves to the paper cups of something trying to pass itself as coffee. He took a whiff of his own to settle himself - a takeaway from one of the few boutique coffee shops he'd allow. His preference was to make his own at home, or in his office. In fact the coffee machine had been one of the first things unpacked when he moved from the shared townhouse to his own new home. It was closer to his office, and he couldn't disagree that it was actually somewhat enjoyable to have his own space again, not impeded by another person, nor full of their possessions. At least Bedelia's and his own tastes had been close enough that it hadn't been too much to bear.

Hannibal was drawn from his reflections as the rest of the small group began to take their seats until all were full but the one next to him. Someone else had signed up for this group but not turned up the previous week and the organisers certainly had more patience than he that they'd left the chair out again this week.

"Good evening everyone," Alana smiled around the group from her own seat in the circle.

Doctor Alana Bloom was the only reason he had joined this specific group rather than seeking any sort of private therapy. They were professional acquaintances, and perhaps she considered that it was her reputation that had resulted in his attendance of this rather low brow group. His reasoning was a little more nefarious - despite being bound by professional constraints, her knowing his pain at least gave him a potential ally in the societal war Bedelia seemed to be waging.

He felt no compunction about it. He had been there for Bedelia through thick and thin for quite some years, and whilst he understood why she had wanted to end it all, he did not deserve the recriminations now levelled at him. Perhaps they should have parted ways sooner? Though he had never held her hostage to their marriage, there was a bitterness there that he couldn't understand. Certainly, he had no reason to believe himself to be the cause of it - Bedelia's hang up about their relationship, the one *she* ended, was unfathomable.

"It was great getting to know you all last week, and I think we have a good understanding of the types of loss at work here, how difficult they can all be to overcome. So, thank you again for all sharing your stories. This week-" Alana stopped as the door opened and everyone not facing the door, as Hannibal was, turned to look as a twitchy and unsure man let himself in. He shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot before starting towards the group, coffee in hand.

Hannibal recognised him immediately as the man who had knocked into him outside the week before. His coffee had spilled, but thankfully he hadn't ended up wearing any of it. The loss of half the cup was enough to cause annoyance.

Rude.

“Hi, I-”

“Mr Graham, welcome, so glad you could join us this week,” Alana’s tone was completely sincere as she stepped to meet the man. She shook his hand then indicated he should sit next to Hannibal - the one empty seat.

The man audibly swallowed, his eyes shifting around the group - clearly aware of, and uncomfortable with, being the focus of attention. He seemed to sag a little with relief when he reached the chair next to Hannibal and dropped into it, eyes reverting to Dr Bloom.

“We won’t put you on the spot right away, Mr Graham,” Alana smiled at the newcomer, “perhaps in a short while you can share your story with us, as everyone else did so last week.”

Hannibal could practically feel the nervous energy vibrating off of the man, so clearly out of his comfort zone. Mr Graham nodded all the same and Alana’s focus went back to the group. Mr Graham knocked back his coffee remnants before setting the cup on the floor. A cup from the same coffeehouse Hannibal had visited, so that was at least one thing in the man's favour.

“We talked last week about different methods for coping with loss, and whilst there are benefits to many of them, it is not a one size fits all approach. In that regard there is one method we’ve found beneficial when running this group before and that’s the Buddy System.” She smiled and there was a smattering of light chuckles throughout the room. “In some ways pain can be an addiction, there is that temptation to relive the loss over and over, especially if it has left you numb to other emotions. As much as we want to move on, we are held hostage to those feelings. So it can be good to have a support system - a bit like having a mentor through addiction recovery. Someone you can call and lean on when the temptation is there to sink into those emotions now that the time has come to try and move on from them.”

Alana glanced around the room with a soft and comforting smile. “It may seem daunting as you’re practically all strangers, but that can be beneficial too. Someone who hasn’t been there with you through your trauma. Because that’s exactly what loss is. And whilst it’s okay to go through the emotions it brings up, there’s a danger in wallowing. In not moving on. You’re all here because you want to stop wallowing, you want to move on, and that’s the only way this will work. It doesn’t hurt to have support through that from a peer going through the same thing.”

She cleared her throat and stood up, “I’m just going to pair you off with your neighbour here, so… Carl and Jessica, Sam and John, Sarah and Nell, Hannibal and Will...”

Hannibal tuned out then as Alana continued around the room, turning to look at his neighbour - Mr Graham - and drawing a deep breath that he let out as a sigh.

The man looked nervous for a moment and again the word twitchy jumped to mind, before he clenched his jaw, rubbed his palm on his trousers and then offered it to Hannibal to shake whilst barely looking at him.

“Will Graham,” he said before clearing his throat. Hannibal really studied him now they were turned face on. His eyes were wild, like a storm over the ocean, his face was clean and he clearly groomed well but hidden behind the three day growth of stubble that was just this side of unkempt. He wore clothes slightly too big for his frame, as though he wished to seem bigger than he was. Likely the man was in a manual profession, or else something that was heavily dominated by the masculine. A tradesman, or perhaps some sort of security or law enforcement. The facial hair suddenly resolved itself in Hannibal’s mind as another way in which this man advertised his

masculinity - to fit in, to be inconspicuous. Because his face was beautiful. Stunningly so. Hannibal could imagine a younger, clean shaved version, would be as pretty as any girl might be. Will Graham was in a profession where he took pains not to look as pretty as he truly was. Interesting.

Hannibal held out his hand and shook, feeling every callus of Will's almost sweaty palm.

"Doctor Hannibal Lecter," he supplied. At the sound of his accent Will's eyes went wide and he felt a slight tremor go through the man. Realisation had dawned on Will Graham that he was the man he'd bumped into the week before. Perhaps even the reason why Will had lost his nerve in attending?

There was a barely discernible tug and Hannibal gripped harder. Not hard enough to cause pain, but enough to keep Will there, their eyes locked. He knew implicitly that if he left go, Will would bolt like a wild animal. He also knew that he found Will Graham interesting enough to not allow it.

"I'm glad you could join us this week," Hannibal purred, trying to charm the man into settling, and not particularly wanting to deal with a fidget. It seemed to work, Will relaxed enough for Hannibal to release his hand without concern. The hand that Will then ran nervously into his dishevelling curls as he chuckled nervously.

"Yeah, um, sorry about bumping you...I, I wasn't paying attention, I-"

"It's quite alright, I understand," Hannibal would have continued but Alana finished her pairing of the circle and had returned to her seat, interrupting the chatter of the newly paired groups with -

"Will, would you like to share your story with us now? I'm sure in the break others will be happy to share with you the ones that you missed." There was no reprimand there, just a pleasant and welcoming smile that seemed to calm Will enough for him to nod.

Even so, Will frowned for a moment before settling forward, eyes cast down and hands steepled in front of him as he rested his elbows on his thighs.

"I, um, I guess I'm here because of my friend Bev. Last year I lost, uh, someone close to me. And I haven't been dealing well. It's been hard, he was in my life a long time and I miss him. I've been internalising it a lot. A whole lot actually. It's been making me more of an asshole than usual," there was a light chuckle from the group, but the way Will stiffened ever so slightly made it clear to Hannibal it was no joke.

"I just, I can't lose a friend over it. I need to forget him and move on before this wallowing drives my last friend away."

Alana wore a sympathetic look that was mirrored around the room. Hannibal knew his own expression would be impassive, but he was certainly intrigued.

"You don't need to forget him, Will," Alana said gently. "It's okay to remember, and enjoy those memories. We're just going to help each other to a place where that's no longer painful."

Will tried for a smile, and to Hannibal it looked somewhat alien on him. He felt a sudden pull to know what it took to draw a genuine smile from the man.

Alana talked more on the different techniques they would try out each week in their pairs, whilst emphasising the need for them to offer support to each other when needed. Hannibal was certain it

was unlikely Will Graham would get in touch with him at all. And he found himself amused by the idea of calling upon Will when the need arose.

Hannibal found it hard to concentrate. He was already well versed in these techniques, but also he could admit to being distracted by his new partner. Who was the person that Will had lost? Family? A friend? A lover?

He spent a long few minutes dwelling on the thoughts before he realised he was studying Will's profile. He was never usually so unaware of his own actions, but he was increasingly distracted by Will Graham's combination of pretty and grumpy. Again, this was something he usually wasn't distracted by, but the further information about that man had drawn him. He was gruff, rude even. He was unable to move on from (perhaps) a dead lover, hid his beauty to compete with toxic masculinity (to which Hannibal was no stranger) and was distractingly pretty. A more diverting combination than Hannibal had come across in a long while.

Added together Hannibal felt a flutter of something in gut. It had been an unreasonably long time since he'd felt physical attraction like this, and it took a moment to realise that was what this was. Whilst he and Bedelia had been together, he'd made a point of closing himself off from it - of never thinking of anyone but her. But now he was free to find an interest in others, to feel desire. And with no effort, this man had piqued it.

"Okay, let's take a quick break," Alana's words interrupted his thoughts once more and there was a scrape of chairs as people began to stand and move, once more to the coffee.

Except Will. He remained seated. He pulled out a cheap but serviceable phone and began to scroll back and forth on the screen. The look on Will's face was one of concentration, so that anyone not able to see the screen might believe he was intently reading something of importance.

Hannibal sat back in his chair content to watch the curious man.

"Can I help you with something Doctor Lecter?" Will asked without looking up.

Hannibal's lips quirked at the corner, "I am just interested to see the lengths you will go to in order to avoid conversation." He said this quietly so that no one else in the room might hear. He had no plans to draw attention to Will's behaviour, at least not whilst he could still be amused by it.

Will glanced at him, a slight sneer at Hannibal's amused smile. He looked back to his phone and continued with his deception.

"I'm not good with people," Will responded gruffly.

"That is a shame," Hannibal replied, "I hope my contacting you as Dr Bloom has suggested we should, will not be a problem for you."

For a fraction of a second Will stiffened, almost imperceptible.

The person Will lost must have been exceptional to be able to get so close to such a clearly guarded person. Hannibal knew no one as guarded as he was himself, so it was natural that the man was all the more intriguing for it.

"I'm sure we'll manage," was Will's terse reply and Hannibal was certain he had forced himself not to respond that he had no intention of opening those lines of communication.

“Quite.” Hannibal couldn’t help a slight grin.

Hannibal said no more as he saw Alana quietly approaching, a concerned look on her face.

“Will, is everything alright?” Alana asked, clearly concerned that he’d had some sort of emergency to deal with considering she’d asked him to mingle during the break.

“Everything's fine,” Will said, pocketing his phone but with clearly no intention to say anything further, leaving Alana adrift.

A frown was beginning to form on her face when Hannibal spoke.

“We were just discussing my situation, as Will and I are to be partners and he was not here last week to hear everyone else’s stories I felt it important to go over.” Hannibal could see Will’s attention had focused on him, despite the fact that he himself was intently looking at Alana and charming her thoroughly.

Alana smiled and gave a slight nod, “I’ll leave you to it then. Five more minutes and then we will regroup.” She wandered back towards the coffee table.

“I, uh… I suppose you’d better tell me your story then, huh?” Will said, the hesitation seemed more like he was being coerced than over any sort of embarrassment.

Hannibal took in a breath and let out the heavy sigh he had become practised at. “In as short a telling as possible, my wife of three years left me for her yoga instructor.”

At that Will’s head whipped around to look at him directly.

“Shit, I’m sorry.”

For a moment Hannibal was sure Will looked, bizarrely, guilty. Hannibal waved a hand dismissively.

“It will be alright I’m sure. I’ve just been experiencing some problems in trying to do this alone. Too easy to find myself spiralling into a pit of anger and petty recrimination. I seem to have gotten stuck at anger. I’m hoping to skip bargaining and depression, and go directly to acceptance.” Hannibal found himself sharing more than he usually would, but perhaps that was just down to the setting?

Will huffed a light laugh at that, “Don’t pass Go!” He offered a gentle smile. “I think I’m stuck there too, just…” he trailed off and shook his head.

Hannibal took the opening, growing ever curious about Will’s mind and machinations, “You mentioned a friend you’re in danger of losing?”

Will clenched his jaw and glanced darkly at Hannibal, clearly unhappy with his prying. Even so, Will seemed to remember that privacy only went so far in a place like this and let out a heavy breath.

“Bev, she’s my best friend. We went through the Academy together, she… She’s family really. I’ve been letting her down. I’ve been angry and irritable. And she’s borne the brunt of that.” He shook his head. “I need to do better.”

“You will,” Hannibal offered, setting a hand on Will’s knee and giving it a light squeeze.

There was a beat, one brief moment, before Will tensed under his hand and cleared his throat. He didn’t move quickly, but he did more surely, changing his position in his chair in a way that dislodged Hannibal’s hand. It wasn’t a jerky movement, it wasn’t recoil. Interesting.

Before either of them could speak again, Will determinedly looking away once more, Alana called them back to order.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will begrudgingly starts to enjoy Hannibal's company

“I went,” Will wasn’t sure whether to expect praise or not, but what he got was a heavy sigh.

“Thank you.” Bev breathed the words into her phone. “How did it go?”

Will shrugged despite her not being able to see him on the other end of the line. “It was… It was a group of people talking about loss and coping mechanisms.”

“Damn, how you must have loved that.” Her tone was dripping in sarcasm. His turn to huff out a breath.

“Yeah, well, anything for you.” Will had meant to tease, but it came out sincerely.

“Good boy,” Bev teased, clearly attempting to save the humour of the situation, “I guess I shouldn’t ask for details?”

Will grinned and rolled his eyes. “You’re such a gossip Katz.”

“Not technically. I never tell anyone, I just like to hear about it.”

That was accurate and Will found his tongue loosened, as he always did with Bev.

“We’ve been paired up with a support buddy-”

Will was interrupted by a bark of laughter and a “Lord help them!” from Bev.

“Mine, well… he’s… ugh. I, I didn’t go last week because I nearly knocked someone on their ass and it just put me off kilter. Turns out that guy was this guy. And now he’s my buddy and I get to call him for support every time I’m about to spiral into shittiness.”

“Oh,” Bev seemed thoughtful. “Is he… okay? Like, does he hate you?”

“Jesus Bev, he only met me for ninety minutes, am I that bad?” Will reeled.

“No, idiot. I meant for knocking into him. Anyone that hates you after spending more than an hour with you is an fool. You’re a delight.”

“I can’t tell if you’re being sarcastic now.”

Bev laughed lightly again before continuing, “So he’s okay that you assaulted him?”

Will rolled his eyes and let out an exasperated sigh, “Pretty sure he’s fine with it. He didn’t mention it. He seems alright, bit stuck up.”

“Pfft, everyone’s stuck up according to you.” He imagined Bev rolling her eyes now.

“That’s not true,” Will wasn’t even convinced of his own words. “Anyway, we talked a bit. I guess it might work.”

Will heard a mock gasp on the line, “Are you actually connecting with another human being, Will Graham?”

“Not like I had much choice,” he grumbled.

There was quiet for a moment before Bev said, “You don’t have to do this Will, I just. I want you to be okay. You haven’t been okay since Randall. But if you’re not comfor-”

“No,” Will cut in, “it’s fine. It’s… I think you’re right. I can’t keep struggling with this. It’s ridiculous that I’m still struggling with this.” Will let out a heavy sigh that came from the centre of his chest, painfully.

“Well, if this helps then I’m glad. Does he seem interesting?” Bev’s tone was gentle - conversation, not pushing.

“I… shit, I didn’t really ask much about him. Or… anything about him. I probably should have, right? All I know is that he’s dealing with a divorce.”

Bev sighed, “And you’re sure he doesn’t hate you?” She joked. "Besides, it was a support group, not a date. I'm sure you're fine."

“I… well… he put his hand on my knee,” Will admitted, still processing that moment himself. At the time he’d had his usual reaction to physical contact with a stranger - to shrug them off as quickly and quietly as possible. But he’d felt the warmth of the hand lingering on his skin for long after. Maybe it was just being there at the help group? Just the fact that it seemed to come from actual concern for his well being?

Not that he had time to process further in that moment as Bev’s squeal pierced his ear -

“Hot damn, Will! Forget what I said about comfort levels, I want to know everything that happens next week!”

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When Will woke his eyes focused in on the empty whisky glass.

It sat on the chair that he used as a bedside table, no doubt leaving a ring mark on the old wood.

He tried to ignore the chair as best he could really, it was a reminder that he didn’t have a bedside table because his bed was in the living room. After Randall died he got rid of his old bed. In fact, he chopped it up with an axe and burned what he could of it before discarding the rest.

He had slept in the single in the spare room for a few days before ordering a new bed. He was out when it was delivered and they left it out on the porch. Will had dragged it in, unwrapped it all and then just pieced it together there and left it. That had not been a good day, and despite things not being nearly as terrible now, he still hadn’t had a day good enough that he had it in him to care enough about dismantling the bed, moving it up to his room and reassembling it there.

Yesterday had been a bad day, he'd needed the whiskey to ensure a goodnight's sleep, but he woke feeling like shit, which didn't help the spiral.

There wasn't any reason for it, some days were just bad. Not many now, not like when Randall first passed, but it almost made them worse for their scarcity. He went through the same motions he always did on those days - he would consider calling Bev, and never did. He just moped and let himself feel, because he'd already tried bottling shit up, before Randall and that had never gone well. Not that this was doing much better, just less internalised aggression.

At least he did feel a little better, rested. Today wouldn't be as bad, and tomorrow he had that group thing.

Will rolled onto his back and looked at the ceiling, listening to the sounds of his old house. It was so quiet without Randall. Something he'd always enjoyed before - a break from the world - a refuge. And then it had become a refuge for both of them and now it was just achingly quiet.

Will clenched and unclenched his fingers, considering reaching for his phone. He wasn't going to call Bev, she'd done her fair share of listening to all this. As much as he was sure she didn't mind being there for him, there was a limit he didn't want to push. It was the only reason he was doing the group thing.

He could call his buddy, Hannibal. Doctor Lecter.

That thought was fleeting but not easy to dismiss. Will felt the need to have human contact, and whilst he understood that was the whole point of Doctor Bloom's buddy system, he just couldn't call.

Hannibal Lecter was not only a complete stranger, but also someone going through his own loss. Again, that had been Bloom's point, but Will wasn't sure he was on board with that. Besides, the group was happening the following evening, he could wait until then for human interaction he was sure.

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Hannibal's mouth and nose twitched - a momentary snarl that passed over his features and then was gone again.

He set down the papers that had just been delivered, placing them on the kitchen counter alongside his freshly brewed coffee.

Surely it was too early in the day to be serving divorce papers?

He let out a heavy sigh, eyeing the packet as he picked up his coffee and sipped, not able to appreciate it in the way he usually did. Not with those papers now hanging over him, but he refused to let them throw his routine. He had planned coffee and breakfast and then a shower before running a few errands. Saturday morning wasn't always the best time for it, but he didn't always have time during the week.

Even so, by the time he'd finished his breakfast he couldn't help but open the packet and pull out the thick wad of papers. There was no way of continuing with the day he'd planned, not with the divorce hanging over him like the sword of Damocles.

He closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath before scanning over the document, trying to fool himself into thinking there wasn't just one thing he was concerned with.

Reason for petition.

Finally, he found it, reread it and clenched his jaw.

Adultery.

It stated Bedelia as the offending party and very little else in that regard. Well, what more was there to say?

He considered asking her about it. Had she really started a relationship with Chiyoh the yoga instructor whilst they had still been married? Not that he could blame her, considering. And it wasn't fair to ask, as much as it stung him.

Hannibal realised he was flexing his hand on the counter. Balling it into a fist every few moments.

Really none of this should bother him as much as it did. In all likelihood she put that just to put *something*. It was too soon for them to apply for a no fault divorce and she didn't want to wait. So there had to be fault. There had to be blame. And frankly there were worse things she could have raised.

He let out a breath, noticing his hand was shaking in anger and that was just… not him. He was a man of deep and powerful emotions, but he always kept them in check. Always beneath the surface. Even with Bedelia - which seemed to suit them both. He was always in control.

And really this wasn't something he should be angry about, it was always going to happen one way or the other. He'd never fooled himself on that count. It just… hurt. Very unexpectedly Hannibal found himself hurt that she had done what he purposely had not. Despite her protestations that she'd be fine with him having any dalliance he liked, he had not. But she had.

Hannibal pushed aside his coffee and straightened his clothes before walking calmly to his study. Perhaps a glass or two of something would be helpful?

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Will didn't recognise the number of the incoming call and almost didn't answer it. But then realisation struck.

Doctor Hannibal Lecter.

Will huffed and wondered whether, if it was him, he was getting in touch because he needed *his buddy*, or because he assumed Will might be in need of him. Given that this buddy system felt like some weird sort of social, and very specific torture for Will, he wasn't sure he was keen on either option.

Will cleared his throat, letting it ring a couple more times before he finally answered gruffly, "Detective Graham, who's calling?"

There was silence for a moment, which made Will grin slightly. Despite having met at group, Lecter seemed like someone who generally had their shit together, so putting him on the back foot felt like the sort of thing Will would enjoy time and again.

“Good evening Detective,” Lecter spoke hesitantly, though his accent seemed a little thicker than it had before.

“Hello Hannibal,” Will countered, purposely stripping the other man’s title.

Perhaps this was why Katz was pretty much his only friend? The only thing Lecter had done to earn this treatment was wear a fancy suit and be a toff. Hardly fair, and very judgemental, and...Will wasn’t above recognising it as his own self preservation instincts. Better to not let anyone close in the first place, be an asshole to everyone. Because it never ended well. Except with Bev and he was still waiting for the day she decided he was too much hard work.

Though there was more to it than that, Will knew. With few exceptions, their conversation at group had actually been some of the most engaging he’d had in a while. After group ended they’d had enjoyed a volleying back and forth that seemed to invigorate them both. Will wasn’t unaware of his own intelligence, though he liked to be discreet about it, and he wasn’t sure he’d ever met anyone who had made him want to display it in such a way.

No, not display. Use it. Not for work or for the years of schooling his smarts had bought him scholarship after scholarship for. But for entertainment, engaging it with someone as equally intelligent as himself until the other man’s eyes had sparkled with… something.

“Are we on first name terms now Will?” There was a pleasant note in Lecter’s voice, as though he was mildly amused. Which weirdly irked Will, but this was of his making so he shouldn't be.

“Why are you calling?” Will winced at how gruff his tone was, how hard his question when he hadn’t meant it to be. He deflected, taking a punt on what he was sure he could hear in Lecter’s voice, “Have you been drinking?”

Hannibal let out a light chuckle, clearly his amusement was with Will. He wanted to ask if the doctor was laughing at him but knew it would come across as the accusation it would be. And that wouldn’t be conducive to continuing with group. He’d be damned if he was going to let Bev down on this.

After a few beats of silence, and Will steeled himself for Lecter checking in on him like he was completely unstable, but finally the doctor replied in a much more sober tone, “The divorce papers came today.”

“Shit,” Will spat the word without consideration, “Are you, uh, how are you?”

“I- I’ve been better. It wasn’t like this wasn’t inevitable, but it was still… She cited adultery as the reason for divorce. Her adultery.”

There was silence between them for a moment and Will winced, really not sure he wanted to get tangled up in all of this. Not that he had much choice.

“You didn’t know she’d cheated on you? Damn.”

“I didn’t so much as suspect until she asked for the divorce,” Lecter cleared his throat. “I shouldn’t have called.”

“I think actually this is exactly what we’re meant to call about? Are you, um… feeling okay? I mean I guess it’s okay to feel sad about this, but… don’t spiral. I mean… mostly for my sake, I

don’t want to go to group tomorrow and have to explain you aren’t there because you’re taking a depression nap and eating your weight in ice cream.”

That pulled a chuckle and Will found himself smiling.

“I’m not sure it’s advisable to eat ice cream and nap at the same time. It would result in a dreadful mess… possibly asphyxiation.”

Will returned the chuckle, “You’re the Doctor, I’ll take that as sound medical advice.”

Lecter hummed his agreement to that and they were quiet again. And Will found he didn’t mind it. In fact, comfortable silences included, he was surprised at how easy it was to talk to Lecter. Of course, all the easier for having him at the end of a phone and not in front of him.

Will made the very sudden realisation that he did in fact find the doctor attractive. It sounded in his head in Bev’s voice, in a taunting tone.

Not that he was going to act on it in any way. In fact he found himself recoiling from the idea of the attraction. He wasn’t good with people, never did well with dating, let alone more than that. And their current situation, Lecter was getting a divorce for crying out loud!

He was scalding himself when the silence was broken.

“Thank you Will, I wasn’t sure why I called really, and I’m not sure what we’re meant to do on these calls. But this has helped. At the least it was better than resorting to calling my therapist.”

Lecter chuckled and Will shook of the heavy feelings of moments earlier, in fact he let out a quiet sigh of relief before letting out a light laugh himself.

“Oh god don’t do that, therapists are the worst. Can’t think of anything I hate more than someone poking around in my head, much less paying them for the pleasure.”

“Is that so?" There seemed both ire and amusement in Hannibal’s tone. "Did I not mention that I’m a psychiatrist, Will.”

“Huh?” Will’s blood ran cold, not just at having inadvertently insulted someone he actually felt like he was enjoying conversation with, but the thought of him being a psychiatrist troubled him.

“I… Thought you were a medical doctor…”

“I never said that,” Lecter continued, “and you never asked.”

He was right. Will must have remained silent for a good while as Hannibal spoke again.

“Is that a problem, Will?”

“Just… Don’t psychoanalyse me. You won’t like me when I’m psychoanalysed.” Will had meant it quite seriously but Hannibal let out a light chuckle in response to what he must have assumed was a joke. “I mean it Hannibal. I don’t do well with therapy. We can do this buddy thing, but I don’t need a therapist, that’s not what I signed up for and.. If you start with that shit then I’m gone.”

He didn’t mean for his tone to rise slightly, to sound so angry. But even so his heart was hammering and it wasn’t just at the thought of having someone trying to get into his head - which was never

going to work out well for anyone. It was the thought of losing this connection that seemed to be forming. A friendship, or whatever it was.

He wasn't sure he'd ever spoken so easily with someone so quickly as this. Not even Katz, she'd worked for it. Wheedled him until he gave up and laughed at one her goofy jokes and then there was no going back from there.

Will wondered if he should be worried that this easiness had come with a therapist. Either way, he found himself interested in seeing how these conversations might progress to friendship. Perhaps.

"I'm sorry, Will. Observing is what we do. If I've made you uncomfortable I apolo-"

"No, I'm sorry," Will interrupted, realising how much he'd jumped the gun on this one. He'd have had no idea Hannibal was a therapist from his behaviour so far, and certainly nothing he'd said or done towards Will. "I shouldn't have thought the worst."

"I assure you, we're not all quacks. But I will respect your boundaries, Will." Hannibal rumbled the words and it felt like there was a warmth to them.

Will couldn't help the smile, "Okay, well… I'm glad we talked about that."

"Me too," Hannibal agreed, "Just one thing… Tell me about your mother."

"Asshole," Will chuckled and his chest felt light when Hannibal returned the laugh, deep and husky.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Instant attraction might be a curse rather than a blessing.

It was an hour before Will needed to leave to get to group, and he could no longer deny that he was starting to feel anxious about the whole thing. Not just the group, but seeing Hannibal Lecter again.

When they had hung up the phone the evening before, Will had been left with a warm and comfortable feeling that soon turned to a familiar acid in his stomach.

He'd poured a glass of whiskey to try and numb his spiralling thoughts of defeat and loss. A loss that hadn't even happened yet, but it would. Whether as friends or something more or less than that, whatever this was with Hannibal, friendship or flirting, it wouldn't last. These things never did. It would only be a matter of time before he said or did something that would drive the man away.

Randall was the only one who had ever stayed and made Will feel like he really wanted to be there. That he was home with Will even though he could pick up at any moment and leave if he wanted. Just wander into the woods and never return.

Will was hit by the crushing weight of grief at the thought. It shouldn't be this hard still!

The irony that Hannibal was the person he should call at such a time as this, was not lost on him and he had laughed mirthlessly into his over full tumbler.

He hadn't slept well and the day had dragged, despite trying to fill it with odd jobs around the house - truly making an effort by cleaning out some of the junk he'd allowed to accumulate in his bedroom. If nothing else the group had made him feel like he really should get his ass in gear and move the bed finally.

It had been a slog physically, but emotionally too when he came across some old albums. He'd forgotten how much stuff he'd dumped out of the way so he didn't have to face constant reminders.

By the time he got in his car he was a near wreck on the inside, an asshole on the outside, as usual. He sat there for a long while, not sure if he was even going to start the engine. It would be so easy not to go, to just wallow in his grief and despair.

Damn it all!

Damn Bev and Alana Bloom and damn Hannibal Lecter. Damn Randall and…

Will's thoughts stopped dead as an image of his parents flashed to mind. Damn them all.

Will put the car into drive so aggressively it was amazing he didn't kill the engine. His jaw was tight and his hands ached where they gripped the wheel. His throat and eyes burned, everything felt raw. He couldn't help but be resigned to the fact that it always would.

*

Hannibal was trying his very best not to watch the door for Will’s arrival, but he couldn’t help it.

Their conversation the night before had been even more stimulating and entertaining than their first meeting. Will Graham was intelligent, witty and abrupt. Hannibal found him interesting, despite himself and dared hope the same might be true in return.

Will was the last to arrive, only just in time for the start of the session. Hannibal tried to temper the warm smile that spread across his lips at the sight of the man, but he found he wasn’t inclined to hide his interest or the friendliness it conveyed. Perhaps beyond this group they might become friendly?

He had no thought to anything beyond friendship in that moment, given their situations. Though he couldn’t deny he found Will attractive, he knew he wanted Will in his life if he didn’t scare him off. Perhaps their conversations would transcend the social expectations that might keep apart people of their varying walks in life. Certainly, they didn't move in the same social circles that would have allowed their meeting. At that thought, Hannibal couldn’t help but be grateful for having decided to attend this group.

Will’s eyes found his and that searing blue was more tumultuous than the last time they had seen each other. Hannibal felt an ache at what might have caused the clear pain that Will was in, but also at the beauty of the man.

He was breathtaking, even in his pain.

Will was silent as he took his seat next to Hannibal, though he might have well have been screaming. The pain came off him in waves and the entire group seemed to recoil from him. All but Hannibal, who instead found himself having to still his hands from reaching out.

The thought shook Hannibal. Yes, Will Graham was interesting and beautiful, but the desire he had awoken in Hannibal to be free with emotions he would usually proprietorial keep in check, left him stunned. The last time he’d felt so inclined toward emotion was the last time he had been with Mischa, before they were separated.

Alana started almost immediately, asking the group to relay stories from the week - those of them who had had to reach out to their 'buddy'. The few that said they'd had to call shared their story and how it had been a positive experience.

Neither Will nor Hannibal made mention of their own call.

When they stopped for their quick break and everyone stood to go to the coffee table, Will and Hannibal remained seated.

"Is everything alright, Will?" Hannibal leaned in to ask quietly, not wanting to draw any attention to the man.

Will spoke, or rather growled, only barely audible, "I'm fine, *buddy*."

Hannibal couldn't help his moment of shock at Will's words, and immediately he tried to recall anything of their phone call that might have upset Will. It had been pleasant as far as he was concerned. More than pleasant!

They had ended up talking for a while, a volley back and forth with someone smart enough to keep up with him. There were moments, he felt, of flirtation. It had been both refreshing and enjoyable. And, he had hoped, the first of many such interactions.

"You don't seem fine, Will." Hannibal pushed, concerned but also a little annoyed at the sudden change, as dispassionate as he wanted to be. There was a stab there, he thought they had connected, perhaps he was wrong?

“I thought we agreed you wouldn’t psychoanalyse me,” Will snapped, his voice a little higher but not loud enough to break through the chatter at the coffee table.

“I’m not, this is merely an observation based on your sudden change in behaviour. I don’t need to be a therapist to see it.”

Will turned in his seat and glared at him, a hard look. Silence fell between them and Hannibal wondered if Will wanted him to read his mind.

Before either could speak again, Doctor Bloom called them back to order and everyone started back to their chairs.

Both of them were completely silent for the rest of the session. Alana talked them through the next step, and what they needed to do before the following session, with their buddy's assistance for support if required.

"Before we really start to unpackage your grief," Alana said softly, "we need to work on making sure you are in the right place to do so. I know some of you might scoff at the idea, but self care is important." She smiled and paused whilst a few of the people in the room chuckled at what they clearly thought to be millennial nonsense.

"I want you to do two things this week, firstly start looking at your diet. Is it healthy? Are you under eating? Over indulging? Drinking too much alcohol? Not drinking enough water? I'm not asking that you immediately change your lifestyle, just write down your observations and next week we'll talk over them, see if we can help each other find a healthy balance. It's too easy to neglect ourselves in regards to diet and exercise when we are grieving.

"Secondly, I want you to have a think about things you enjoy, things you do for stress relief. Running, swimming, drawing. Anything that brings you pleasure, that you might not have realised has fallen a little by the wayside. If you have the time and compunction, perhaps do one of these things. Again we'll talk more on that next week, but for now I want to talk about some of the exercises we're going to do in the coming weeks."

Alana carried on but Hannibal found himself tuning out, resisting the urge to steal glances at Will.

As it was, he could feel how tense the man was just from the proximity. He could practically hear the grinding of teeth.

Hannibal knew he would be unable to resist the urge to talk more with him once the session was over.

*

Will grabbed his coat and bag quickly and was out the door the moment Doctor Bloom released them.

Part of his mind told him he should never have come, and shouldn't ever come back. But he knew that would risk his friendship with Bev, and he couldn't do that. No matter how uncomfortable it was to sit there next to a man that he had started to find a connection with when he so desperately didn't want one. Or perhaps because he did?

As if summoned by Will's thoughts, Will heard Hannibal's voice behind him.

"Will, please wait."

Will opened the external door to the community centre and walked out onto the street, grateful for the blast of cool air.

"Please Hannibal, not now." Will said as he felt the man follow him out.

For a moment they stood there in silence before Hannibal asked, "I apologise if something I said upset you. That was never my intention."

Will let out a mirthless chuckle and shook his head. "There's never an intent with these things, is there?"

He couldn't help the bitterness in his tone. He knew it was ridiculous to be reacting this way simply because they got along. They connected and Will could feel the potential for something there. Something he didn't want for fear of how it would all end. None of that was Hannibal's fault, and yet it seemed reasonable to treat him like it was.

Will let out a deep breath and his shoulders sagged.

They both remained silent as their fellow attendees began to leave the building, a few askance glances.

"Can I walk you to your car?" Hannibal asked and Will couldn't find a good reason to refuse, so he simply nodded and began to walk out into the cold.

Will blew out a breath as he pulled his keys from his pocket and came to a stop next to his beat up old hatchback.

"I'm sorry," Will said quietly, knowing he had to. As much as he wanted to push the man away, Hannibal didn't deserve his vitriol. "It's not you. It's… I'm not good with people. I tried to tell you."

"Will," Hannibal said gently, "Let me help, we're supposed to lean on each other. Let me-"

"We're not friends, Hannibal." Will interrupted. "We've been thrown together and… I'm not your responsibility."

"Will, please."

Hannibal placed a hand gently on Will's shoulder and he flinched for a moment. Just a moment, and then found himself melting into the comfort of it. Accepting it, as he had the comfort in the

phone call. The comfort in the connection that he had almost immediately felt with this man, whether he wanted to or not.

He wanted to curse himself for being so accepting of that comfort.

He was about to shrug Hannibal off when the hand gripped his shoulder and turned him, as Hannibal stepped forward. The motion ended with Hannibal enveloping Will in his arms. Almost of a height, Will found himself resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder and accepting the embrace as they fit together perfectly.

"This is ridiculous," Will forced out the words but still couldn't find it in him to pull from the embrace. "I'm a mess."

Hannibal huffed a chuckle, "Of course you are. That's why you come to group. That's the whole point."

Will nodded and exhaled a small laugh of his own against Hannibal's thick coat.

"I don't mean to take it out on you, I just… push people away. Before they can get too close." Will admitted, having to force every word out and wincing at each of them.

"I'm not especially good at letting people know the real me either," Hannibal rumbled the words softly, his hand comfortingly stroking up and down Will's back. "But I'd like us to be friends, Will. I'm glad we were paired together. I think in many ways we're identically different, and that might prove an interesting combination."

Will breathed out another little chuckle, "Are we friends or a science experiment."

"More a social experiment, I think." Hannibal replied as he pulled back enough to smile at Will.

Will returned the smile, their bodies still pressed close and Hannibal's arms still around him.

Silence fell between them as they studied each other for a moment. Breath steaming a little in the cold air. Will noticed how Hannibal's eyes flashed with something, some eagerness, and then broke contact long enough to look down at his lips.

Will's heart skipped a beat as he realised what was about to happen the moment before it did.

The moment before Hannibal crowded against him and pressed their lips together.

It was a chaste kiss, soft and slow. Will opened to Hannibal as the man pressed his advantage, pushing Will against the truck.

Will was shaking, trembling. He resisted the urge to grab hold of Hannibal, or run his hands up around his neck, into his hair. Instead keeping them rigid at his side, not trusting himself.

He just didn't want to hurt. But he didn't want to hurt anyone else either.

With a grunt, Will broke the kiss and pushed Hannibal off.

"No…" Will started, not even able to put into words how he felt. The word came out angry and Will let out a breath. He was angry, he was enraged. He didn't want to feel this way and how dare someone make him.

Will pushed passed a stunned looking Hannibal and moved around the truck to the driver's side.

"Will, I'm sorry, I-" Hannibal started, cool but clearly panicked, a look in his eyes that spoke of his regret. But Will wouldn't hear it.

He slammed the door behind him and started the engine, pulling out of the parking lot as fast as he possibly could.

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Hannibal watched as Will drove away.

Initially bewildered, he shook his head and clenched his jaw. Cursing himself for being a fool.

It had been so easy, so natural. He had assumed that Will had been interested too.

After the way the spoke together, the way Will allowed himself to be held.

Perhaps being with Bedelia so long had skewed his sense of attraction? Because he very much was attracted to Will Graham, in a way he wouldn't have allowed himself to be whilst with Bedelia. And he had believed that attraction to be mutual.

He had wanted to be respectful of Bedelia, no matter what she had proposed for them. A proposal that now seemed to be more about her wants and desires than any consideration to him.

Which was perfectly fine, he just wished she had been honest about that. About her needs outside of their marriage.

He shook his head and started towards his car, hating the fact that this moment had lead him to thoughts of his soon to be ex-wife, despite how natural such a thought process was. Because he wanted to be thinking only of Will in that moment. And as he reached his car, he was.

Hannibal slid into the leather seat of his Bentley and placed his hands on the wheel, gripping it tight as he shook with anger.

How could he have been so foolish?

Not everyone was in the same situation as he, not everyone was dealing with his loss. Or whatever the hell it was he was dealing with. Another social experiment, might be a better way to describe it. Certainly he wasn't dealing with the loss of love.

No, he and Bedelia had never really had that between them. At least not in the way expected of married couples.

Will was dealing with loss. Presumably of a lover. A man who had been in his life for many years.

He had kissed a man still grieving for his dead love and the thought of that was immediately reprehensible.

Hannibal stilled his breath and took out his phone, thinking to message Will an apology. But instead he stared at the screen a long moment before tossing it into the passenger seat.

He was the last person he was sure Will wanted to hear from at that moment. Later he would message, or call. Later he would apologise and…

Hannibal started his engine and pulled out of the lot, trying to push down his desire to want to tell Will Graham everything. To truly be seen by the man as who he really was.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Will needs a friend, and whether he likes it or not, Hannibal is there.

Will woke, panting and sobbing. Attempting to catch his breath as tears rolled down his cheeks.

He swiped them away, trying to focus his eyes and make sure he was actually in his room and not somewhere else. Not still in the dream.

It took a moment for everything to come into focus, before he was able to calm himself. He was in his room, the dark of night oppressive. But it *was* his room.

Will tried to shake away the images of his childhood home, well one of them at least. The looming presence of his father and the unavoidable heaviness of loss at the absence of his mother.

He was little more than twelve, and in his arms lay a dog, covered in blood. Will was too. It was all over the kitchen floor and Will could feel the pain in his chest that didn't allow him to draw breath then or now.

There was more blood in the dream than there had been in real life. He was sure of that, the memory had stayed with him so clearly.

Less than a year after his mother had died, and he'd become introverted and even more quiet than he had been before. His only comfort was his dog, Chance. The day Chance got caught in the bear trap on the neighbouring property, Will cried. For the first time since before his mother died, he cried until he thought he wouldn't be able to breath anymore.

Chance was already dead when the neighbour dropped him on their porch with a grumbled comment about not letting animals wander loose. Will had dragged him into the house until the weight of the dead animal had halted him and so he had held him there on the kitchen floor.

His father had come home and his anger was terrifying. Anger at causing problems with the neighbour, at getting blood all over the damn place, at Will crying over a damn dog.

"You never even cried when your mama died you little freak, now you're crying over a fucking dog?"

The words had rung in his head, like a sharp pain ricocheting inside his skull. But Will hadn't been able to control his tears and that had not gone over well.

That was the first time he ended up with a broken arm.

The pain of it, of the loss and the fear and even the physical pain, resonated through Will in his dream. It had felt so real. Like he was back there and there was no escape.

Will sat up in the sweat laden sheets and sobbed, letting his head fall into his hands.

He had always been prone to nightmares, sometimes he just felt too damn much and that was how his brain processed it. But these ones, reliving this particular event, had only started when Randall died and were becoming more frequent.

He cried for a few minutes, letting the tears flow as he tried to catch his breath. His mind now filling with memories of Randall, happy times together, which only made him feel worse.

When the tears finally subsided, Will took a few calming breaths and got up from the bed. It really was the dead of night, completely pitch black as he stumbled to the kitchen and grabbed a glass of water. He drank that down before heading to his living room, flicking on a side lamp and dropping down into the chair he had occupied earlier in the evening. A comfortable armchair with the whiskey and tumbler still on the side table next to it.

His hand shook a little as he poured a couple of fingers of whiskey and knocked them back in two long gulps. He refilled the glass and sat back, sipping at it.

The house was quiet.

So quiet that it hurt.

Will hated it.

*

Hannibal blinked awake, trying to focus enough as sleep left him, to work out what had woken him.

His phone on the bedside table was lit up and it was vibrating on the hardwood.

With his mind and body reacting as it had all those years ago when he'd still been a doctor occasionally on call, Hannibal was suddenly wide awake. He grabbed the phone and answered it without looking to see who was calling.

"Doctor Lecter," He said, then cleared his throat of the rumbling depth sleep had given him.

"Doctor Lecter," The name was repeated, and he could almost hear the wince in Will Graham's voice.

"Is everything okay, Will?" Hannibal asked. He swung his legs from the bed and reached over to the lamp. He closed his eyes for a moment against the brightness before looking down at the clock.

Just before 5am.

It wasn't easy to ignore the thumping in his chest. An erratic reaction to the middle of the night contact from someone he wasn't sure would speak to him again. And the fear that it was his own actions the day before that resulted in Will being up and clearly not himself.

"I'm sorry, I was going to call Bev…" Will sounded a little drunk and Hannibal felt his heart hurt all the more.

"What happened?"

Will laughed, self deprecating and short. “I had a bad dream. I just… wanted to talk to someone. It’s so quiet here. I’ve been up for hours and I just…”

Will trailed off and Hannibal could hear the trembling in his voice.

“Would you like me to come over?” Hannibal asked before scalding himself inwardly. He hadn’t meant anything more than being there for him, but of course he had now complicated any such offer by his actions outside the group session.

Will must have thought the same as he made a little amused huff. “Do you think I’m that easy, Doctor?”

“The offer was purely friendly, I promise. I apologise again, Will. What happened earlier-”

Will cut him off, “Wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t let it. Don’t beat yourself up over it Hannibal. You’re not that irresistible that I lost complete control of my faculties.”

Hannibal couldn’t help but smile at the slightly slurred and less inhibited words.

“Good to know.” He replied in a low purr.

They were silent for a moment before Will continued, clearing his throat first and maybe sobering a little.

“I’m sorry I woke you. I just thought… Sometimes the quiet drives me mad.”

“It’s quite alright, Will. This is what we are meant to do, for group.” Hannibal gently reasoned.

Will hummed, as though thinking it over.

“I used to have pets, it wasn’t so quiet then.” Will added without prompting.

Hannibal took that in for a moment. “Had? Perhaps it’s something you should consider-”

“No.” Will stopped him abruptly, “I can’t. I’m not… I’m better off alone right now.”

Hannibal blinked and drew in a deep breath, keeping his mouth shut lest he be accused again of psychoanalysing. Which wasn’t to say that he hadn’t been. There was certainly something very deep seated going on with Will, and if he were a patient Hannibal would find him fascinating.

The friendly banter they had enjoyed, the man’s sharpness and the kiss they had shared, all made Hannibal very glad that Will wasn’t his patient.

“Do you want to tell me about your nightmare?” He asked gently and then enjoyed the chuckle at the other end of the line.

“No, I really don’t. I just… wanted to hear someone’s voice. Maybe I should get a television.”

Hannibal smiled and hummed, “Yes, well. I hear they make great babysitters so they must be good company.”

Will chuckled again and they both fell silent once more. Though he was sure he heard Will audibly swallow.

“Thanks, Hannibal. I’m glad you picked up. After earlier I… I was unfair.”

“Please, Will. There’s no need to discuss it if you don’t wish. I overstepped and that is on me, I apologise if I made you feel uncomfortable.”

Another laugh then, a little more hearty, “I wasn’t uncomfortable. Well… I was, but not… You’re a good kisser.”

Hannibal blinked and he could quite imagine Will Graham blushing at the other end of the line.

“Communicating like this is easier.” Will said with a heavy sigh.

“You like to keep people at arm’s reach.” Hannibal surmised, “Even those whose company you might enjoy.”

“I do enjoy your company.” Will said hesitantly, almost unsure whether he should.

“As I do yours,” Hannibal replied, trying not to let the eagerness into his tone.

“I’m sorry I can’t… be more. Do more. I can’t.” Will sounded regretful and Hannibal took consolation in that. It seemed as though Will were interested, that perhaps he hadn’t misread that at all, but that it was too soon?

Too much? Will wasn’t ready.

Hannibal fought down the urge to tell Will he was happy to wait, knowing that he’d come across like a teenager with a crush. Which he was sure was actually an increasingly apt description for him where Will was concerned.

“Friends is fine, Will. If you’d like. If not, then we can go back to being group buddies.” Hannibal couldn’t help the sound of distaste over the word buddies.

Will chuckled, “Buddies is not a word that fits your vocabulary.”

“Hmm,” Hannibal hummed and smiled. “Perhaps friend is better then.”

It wasn’t a question, but he was glad when Will responded, “Yes, friends. That would be good. Good night Hannibal.”

Will hung up and Hannibal lay back down in his bed, staring up at the ceiling.

*

Had it not been for the late night call, that reassured Hannibal that Will was not upset with him over what had happened, he might have assumed that Will not coming to group was his fault.

He didn’t want to be intrusive, but given everything that he knew of Will so far, he was worried enough that he sent a message during the break.

Will didn’t reply immediately, in fact a response didn’t come through until later that evening once Hannibal was home. Will apologised and said that he had been caught up with something at work and had not realised what evening it was. He had mentioned in passing a few times before, that he

had recently started teaching at the Police Academy, and Hannibal imagined that might be even more demanding than a regular college teaching post.

It was a plausible excuse and Hannibal thought nothing of it until the following week when Will didn't show again.

Alana gave him a concerned look at the start of the session when Will's chair remained empty and then came over to him at the end. Speaking in hushed tones as everyone else gathered their coats and left.

"Hannibal, I heard from Will earlier. I didn't want to mention in front of everyone and… well, I was hoping he'd change his mind and turn up. He messaged to let me know he wouldn't be attending anymore. I'm assuming that he didn't tell you?"

Hannibal frowned, "No, he didn't."

Alana shrugged, "It happens sometimes. People aren't always ready to move on. I was just hoping that… Will seemed like he would benefit from this. I'm sorry that he isn't ready to deal with that just yet."

"As am I," Hannibal agreed, keeping his voice level whilst inside his emotions roiled.

"We'll see about fixing you up with a new buddy, or some other arrangement." Alana had continued with a forced cheeriness.

They said goodbye and Hannibal went out to his car, half tempted to call or message Will then and there. But the fact that he had let Alana know and not Hannibal, likely meant that their communication was over as far as Will was concerned.

If Hannibal was willing to accept that.

*

Will was tired.

His nightmares were almost every night now and he'd switched from self medicating with a little whiskey, to taking actual sleeping pills. But apparently they weren't really strong enough to make any kind of difference.

As his class filed out for the last session on the late Friday afternoon, he was glad to see the back of them.

He packed up his satchel of notes and started back to his office. His plan was to go and pack up the papers he still hadn't marked from the week before, then go home and roll into bed with the intention of waking up sometime on Sunday and getting to the papers.

Will opened his office door, not noticing until he was part way through doing so, that a figure stood on the other side.

"Hannibal?" Will recognised the man before he'd even fully turned from Will's desk to face him. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Confusion was trumped by anger at the intrusion. Will stepped inside and quickly closed the door behind him, not wanting to be overheard.

“This is… Very unprofessional. You can’t just show up where I work and… This isn’t okay…”

Will trailed off as he looked down to see that Hannibal had picked up an item from his desk and had no doubt been studying it before Will came in.

A photo.

“You shouldn’t be here,” Will growled and snatched the photo from Hannibal’s hands.

Hannibal, whilst looking mildly contrite before, now seemed surprised at the sudden flash of anger. Will ignored it as he set the photo face down onto the desk, moving around it until he was the other side and dropped into his chair.

Hannibal remained quiet for a moment before taking the seat opposite and steepling his fingers on the desk.

“I apologise for the ambush, Will. Please be assured I am here as your friend, not as a doctor. I have not divulged anything to any of your colleagues.”

“Fuck,” Will muttered, angrily. “This is… It’s not okay for you to come here. How the hell did you even get in?”

“I have guest lectured on criminal psychology a number of times in the past. Before your tenure it would seem. My name is on some sort of approved list I believe. I said I was here to visit you and was signed in. A colleague let me into your office to wait. I only arrived here minutes before you did. I’m glad I caught you.”

Will shook his head, closing his eyes and pressing his fingers hard against his eyelids.

“What do you want?”

“I was worried, Will. As your friend. Alana said you wouldn’t be returning. And when you didn’t respond to my messages, I wanted to check that you were okay.”

“I’m fine.” Will spat, “I don’t need group.”

Not that he’d told Bev that. She was still under the impression he was going. And that just added to the immense amount of shame he felt over the whole damn situation.

“As your friend, and as a professional, I beg to differ.” Hannibal replied softly despite the antagonistic words.

Will shook his head, all the more annoyed and the soft plea in Hannibal’s eyes. “I don’t need it Hannibal. I’m wasting everyone’s time. I have no right to be there and you have no right feeling sorry for me.”

“I don’t pity you, Will. If that’s what you think. I simply wish to-”

“Just stop.” Will raised his voice and Hannibal did as asked.

Will felt the anger bubbling up inside him. He had so wished he could just cut the whole thing off and not have concerned parties come after him like this. And it was all his own fault, no matter how he sliced it.

“You just don’t understand, Hannibal.” Will growled. “That night that I called, after the nightmare. The next morning, in the harsh light of day.” Will shook his head. “I realised what a fraud I was being. There’s Doctor Bloom, running this group to help people. And you’re there answering the phone in the middle of the night because you think you have a friend in need. It’s a fucking sham.”

Will’s chest was tight. He felt short of breath like he did when he had nightmares.

“Will, are you alright?”

He could see Hannibal looking at him with a concerned expression, though it was all a little hazy, the room was dark around the edges.

“You’re not a fraud, Will. Your emotions are valid and-”

“Randall was a dog. Don’t you get it. A fucking dog.” Will all but shouted and picked the picture back up, slamming it face up in front of Hannibal. A photo of Will and an Irish Hound next to a river. “I’m going to group because I can’t deal with the fact that my fucking dog died.”

Will's vision blurred and for a moment he thought he must be crying.

“Will,” Hannibal’s tone was one of concern, not anger, as he stood and started around the desk to him. Though Hannibal kept blurring in his vision, and he couldn’t catch a breath.

He couldn’t breathe at all.

“Will, you’re okay.” Hannibal said soothingly. Will realised he was being gently pulled from his chair, he felt like a dead weight as Hannibal moved him to the floor and sat him against the wall. “You’re having a panic attack, just try to breathe.”

Will let out an anguished sob.

*

It had taken quite some time to settle Will. But Hannibal had gladly done so in order to avoid calling for assistance. Will was clearly deeply ashamed of the situation he was in and Hannibal wasn’t about to add to that by allowing Will’s colleagues to see him in a compromised state.

So he had coaxed him back into a normal breathing pattern, gentled him and given him water. It took an hour before Will was settled enough to agree to let Hannibal drive him home as he was in no fit state.

Hannibal had input the address Will gave into his satnav, and within minutes of leaving the Academy Will was asleep.

It seemed an unremarkable, hopefully dream free, sleep and Hannibal was loathe to wake him when they arrived at the secluded little house that had to belong to Will Graham.

“You don’t need to come in,” Will had slurred through his complete exhaustion, before almost falling out of the car as he tried to open his door.

Hannibal shushed him and assisted him into the house.

He helped Will to the sofa and lay him down. Will was drifting off again almost immediately, so Hannibal pulled the throw from the back of the sofa and covered Will.

With that done, Hannibal realised he should probably leave. But he found he couldn't.

He tried to rationalise it that Will would need a ride again the next day to collect his own vehicle from the Academy. But in truth, he just didn't want to leave him.

Will looked so small and vulnerable. He had inadvertently cracked himself open for Hannibal, because Hannibal had unwittingly given him no choice. And there was a responsibility that came with that.

As a friend, if nothing more.

Hannibal looked around and saw the cosy looking armchair that would do for him for the night. But he didn't go to it right away, instead he crouched in front of Will and stroked some stray curls from his forehead.

"There's nothing to be concerned with, Will. It will all be alright."

Will remained silent other than the soft, deep breaths of his slumber.

Hannibal moved to the armchair then, watching over him and thinking on Will's confession. How certain Will had been that the trauma caused by his loss was somehow less for it having been a pet and not a lover. He could understand Will's feelings on it, though he was wrong. Hannibal knew that for certain, as a psychologist. Some losses hurt deeply, whether a lover, a pet, a job or a marriage. There was no scale on which they could or should be measured.

But his sympathy for Will's situation was more than an acceptance of this.

After all, if Will was a fraud, then so was he. He'd be a hypocrite to think Will was a fraud and not himself, given his own situation with Bedelia.

Sham didn't even begin to cover it.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Therapy. In bed.

"Wake up," Will's voice was gentle and coaxing. Quiet, as though scared to wake anyone else, despite them being the only two people there.

That, and the darkness of the room when he blinked his eyes open, made clear to Hannibal that it was the middle of the night.

"Are you alright, Will?" Hannibal was immediately awake, concerned and ready to act. But Will's hand rested gently on his shoulder.

"Sorry, I should have let you sleep. You just look uncomfortable."

Hannibal relaxed back into the chair now that it was clear that Will was fine. Under the circumstances at least.

"I woke up, my neck is sore. I'm going to go up to bed. You can, uh… It's cold down here. I don't want you getting sick." Will's words were awkward and Hannibal had a great sense of intruding on the man's space.

"I can sleep on the sofa, Will. Or if you prefer, I can leave. I'm happy to come back for you in the morning and drive you to get your car." Hannibal offered, quite sincere.

Will shook his head and let out a quiet chuckle, that made Hannibal feel that at least Will wasn't entirely displeased with his unplanned company.

"Don't be stupid. Look, the thing is…" Will stood upright and scratched at the back of his neck. A slight wince on his face. "The rest of the rooms are full of junk. You can share with me but I just… I need you to know this isn't a come on or something. I just don't want your discomfort on my hands. Okay?"

"Of course," Hannibal answered soberly. He wouldn't dream of crossing any line that Will put in place. He was more than aware that Will's reaction to Randall's death spoke of something deeper, and if he could help with that as a friend, if nothing else, then he wanted to.

"Okay then," Will replied sternly and turned, leaving the room.

Hannibal took that as the intended cue and rose to his feet. He was stiff and his neck ached a little, so he couldn't say that Will didn't have a point. He followed after him, up the creaky stairs and into the master bedroom.

It was much like the rest of the house. Sparse but for practical furniture and trinkets that he was sure Will didn't purchase. There was a small pile of books on the bedside drawers closest to the

door, and so Hannibal started to the otherside of the bed.

Will watched him and then gave him a questioning look, as though they had needed to have a conversation about whom prefered which side.

“I can see that is your side of the bed, unless you sleep in the middle. In which case, I will endeavour not to get in your way.” Hannibal teased lightly.

Will chuckled, “I’m going to apologise straight up for the fact that I often have bad dreams and could sweat through all my clothes.” His face fell a little as he seemed to consider, before continuing soberly, “Though that seems to happen less if someone is in the bed with me.”

Hannibal couldn’t help but wonder what sort of bed fellows Will was entertaining. Was he simply referring to the reassuring presence of the large dog he’d lost. Or did he often bring people home with him? His house was that of a perpetual bachelor so Hannibal imagined he would only have a casual relationship at the moment, if at all. Perhaps instead then, picking people up for sex? When they first met and he’d heard the story of Randall, he’d assumed that Will’s preference included men. Could Hannibal be his only experience of men? And had that been a pretence, no longer needed now he knew the truth about Randall?

Hannibal couldn’t say that for sure. Will was almost entirely a closed book to him, it would seem. The thought that Will might be straight, and allowing people to believe that he lost a male lover so as not to admit to Randall being a pet, changed things. Hannibal certainly looked at their encounter outside of group in a different light. No wonder Will had rejected his ill timed advances.

When Hannibal looked over, Will had stripped to his boxer shorts and undershirt, and so he felt obliged to do the same. He carefully removed his clothes and folded them, placing them in a clear space on top of a dresser.

Hannibal turned back to the bed and saw Will had already climbed in but was propped up on an elbow, watching him with a grin.

“Fastidious, aren’t you.” Will teased.

“The material is expensive and can be difficult to get the creases out of.” Hannibal explained, he went to the bed and Will pulled back the covers for him to get in. He settled as far from Will as he could without it seeming too excessive. “I prefer to drape them, but this will do for tonight.”

Will laughed and shook his head. “You really are a character. You’re so… odd. But in a good way. I like it. I like your company.”

Hannibal smiled and was about to say that he returned the sentiments, when Will seemed to catch himself in the words and the situation. His demeanour changed to something altogether more distant and reserved.

“Well, we should try to rest.” He said and with no further pomp, he rolled over and settled to sleep with his back to Hannibal.

*

Will woke and winced. He’d forgotten to close the curtains properly and a blade of daylight was hitting the wall right where his eyes focused when he opened them.

He decided the only thing for it was to pull up the covers over his head and escape the need to get out of bed.

As he did so, the blankets snagged and he heard a rumbling noise.

Hannibal.

Before he had a chance to consider whether Hannibal was awake or not, he felt an arm come around him.

Will went entirely still, not sure how to react. Caught between wanting to shove the doctor away, and wanting to sink into the half embrace.

Another snuffly noise and Hannibal was snuggled up against his back. His breathing gentle and deep. Clearly he was still asleep and Will's movements had drawn him in like a fish on a hook.

Will considered moving, gently shrugging the man off or even getting out of bed. But he couldn't help but feel as though he owed Hannibal more than that. He'd already helped Will through a meltdown, brought him home and was willing to give himself backache by sleeping in the armchair. It would be rude to now wake him just because he was so close.

It wasn't as though Will was uncomfortable.

The thought made Will draw a deep breath and gently sigh it out, not wanting to wake Hannibal. He snuggled back a little. Not pressing against him, but just falling a little further into his arms. Arms that tightened around him in response.

Will drifted back off to sleep, comfortable and held.

*

Hannibal woke, unexpectedly, pressed against Will's back.

The evening before immediately came back to him and he knew he should pull away. He knew that in all likelihood they had ended up this way in the night and Will was unaware. He could imagine Will waking now and being unpleasantly surprised, especially after the conversation they'd had about not being intimate.

Hannibal tried to pull away gently, so as not to wake Will, and was surprised when Will simply moved with him. More than that, as he moved back, Will rolled so that he was then facing Hannibal, snuggling into his chest.

Hannibal let out a shuddering breath, knowing the action was unconscious and he shouldn't interpret it as anything more, but it was so very pleasant.

He lay there, Will in his arms snoring softly. What else could Hannibal do but hold him?

They remained this way for at least twenty minutes, before Will's breathing started to change and it was clear he was rousing from his slumber. Hannibal considered pulling back then, to save any embarrassment, or worse. But before he had the chance, Will drew in a deep breath before burrowing his face against Hannibal and then freezing. Apparently the unexpected contact had startled him to full wakefulness.

Hannibal expected Will to scramble away from him, perhaps even leap from the bed. But instead Will pulled back just enough to give Hannibal an apologetic look.

"I'm… Shit, I'm really sorry." Will said, though he still didn't move.

"That's quite alright," Hannibal muttered, resisting the urge to bury his nose in Will's hair and increase the intimacy between them.

They held eye contact for a long moment, before Will finally looked away and moved. Gently pulling from Hannibal and resting back onto his pillows. Not running away, it would seem, and Hannibal was grateful for that.

"Thanks," Will said quietly, looking up at the ceiling. "For yesterday. I feel like an idiot."

Hannibal shook his head, "There's no need, Will. I apologise for having put you in that position. It was-"

"Hannibal," Will's tone was jovially scalding as he glanced over to him, "I've been lying to everyone in group this whole time. I'm the asshole here."

Hannibal shook his head, thinking of a response for a moment, realising this might be the only chance he'd get to discuss the situation with Will.

"You never lied, Will. People made assumptions and you had no obligation to correct them. Besides which, the trauma you have experienced over Randall's death is clearly real. And you have as much right as anyone else to seek help in any way that suits you."

Will scrubbed a hand roughly over his face, and for a moment, Hannibal was sure he was going to change the subject, but instead he let out a long sigh.

"Still feel like an idiot though. How can…. It's crazy that I'm so distraught over a dog." He let out a self deprecating chuckle and Hannibal gave a reassuring, gentle smile.

"Grieve and loss aren't simple things, Will. Besides, I am sure there are plenty of animal lovers who would disagree that you're crazy for grieving the loss of a pet to this degree. They do become family after all."

Hannibal stopped there, for that moment at least and Will gave a thoughtful hum.

"Do you have any family, Will? This seems very much the house of a bachelor."

Will gave him a sideways glance, "Don't think for one minute that I believe you're just trying to find out if I'm single." Will grinned softly, rejoining with, "I am. But, don't think I haven't realised you're trying to psychoanalyze me, as you promised not to. You're not as subtle as you think Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal smiled at that, at how easily Will saw through his manipulations and traps. The tricks that made him exceptional at his job.

"You might as well have led with *tell me about your mother*," Will grinned.

Hannibal chuckled and then replied quickly, "Tell me about your mother, Will."

Will gave him an incredulous look and took a deep breath, sighing it back out, sobering.

"She's gone. Died when I was ten."

"I'm sorry, Will." Hannibal replied sincerely and meant it. Already formulating more of an idea of the psyche of his new friend. Such a significant loss at a young age might certainly have contributed to his processing of death now.

"What about you?" Will asked abruptly, trying to sidetrack this into a conversation rather than what he perceived to be a therapy session.

"A family? No. My parents died when I was a young man at college. I have a younger sister, Mischa, that I don't see as much as I'd like. My wife and I never desired children. And now, of course, my wife is no longer around." Hannibal said bluntly, observing Will intently, catching the flicker of discomfort when Hannibal mentioned his wife.

"Shit, sorry. Yeah, I shouldn't have-"

"It's quite alright, Will. I…" Hannibal trailed off, very tempted to tell Will the truth of his situation. The only person he'd ever wanted to confide in, but he knew that his judgement was impaired by his attraction to the man. He wanted to tell Will how much he missed Mischa and everything he'd tried to do for her. He wanted comfort.

Thankfully, before he could continue, Will offered, "I'm an orphan too. My dad…" Will let out a breath and then an uncomfortable chuckle.

Hannibal shifted in the bed a little to better look at him, "You don't need to tell me anything you'd rather not."

Will shook his head, "It's not that. It's just… It's a lot. We… We didn't get on. When I was younger. He didn't cope well when mom died and I took the brunt of that. Then when he caught me kissing Richie Sykes in the woodshed, he was even less inclined to treat me civilly. It was a fraught few years, and then I left for college. I didn't see him for years after that. I never went back."

Hannibal raised a brow, wondering if he was getting closer to the issues Will had surrounding loss. The loss of his mother in what sounded like a sudden and unresolved way, and then his father, left with no closure.

"Did you reconcile at all before he died?"

Will barked a laugh, rubbing a hand over his face again and then he looked at Hannibal with wild eyes. As though he could barely contain within him the raw emotion that had been tapped.

"No, I wouldn't say that. I never went back, but he did come here. He was diagnosed with a particularly aggressive cancer, when he was admitted to a hospice they called me as his next of kin. He only had a few weeks left. I went to visit him and I don't know… I felt sorry for him? He was broken and he wasn't all there. His memory was going, not that he wasn't just as damn hateful. But he begged me, he didn't want to die in there. So I brought him home with me, looked after him. He died three weeks later."

Will let out a heavy breath and Hannibal had the sense that he hadn't imparted this information to many people in his life.

He continued in a lighter tone, "Then I got promoted to a Detective position here, moved here. Enjoyed the quiet for a bit, but… It was just kinda strange. I didn't miss the noise of the city, but there was something, I don't know. White noise. My dad had a ventilator and I got used to it. The constant background noise. In the end I figured I was just missing company, so I got Randall from a rescue centre."

Will breathed out heavily, as though considering the impact on his life.

“I took a sabbatical to take care of my dad, and things were difficult for me when I went back. I ended up moving into the teaching post, which actually worked out much better for looking after a dog. More regular hours.”

Hannibal nodded, connecting the obvious dots. Will had never truly dealt with the loss of his father and the period of upheaval that came with it. Possibly not the loss of his mother either, and instead had become distracted by caregiving for his pet. It was a crutch and a distraction that was no longer there. It was no wonder that Will was having such a hard time coping with the loss of Randall.

He had a good enough sense of Will that he didn't voice this aloud, instead storing it away for when it might be appropriate to broach the topic. It did, at least, help Hannibal better understand what he might be able to better do to support Will.

Suggesting he get another dog would be akin to putting a bandaid on arterial bleed. Though, it might be good for Will, it would be worse in the long run if it was just used as another way to avoid dealing with the losses he'd had.

Even so, Will needed something. He needed companionship.

"If I can be blunt, Will? It sounds like you need company. And from discussions we've had about your close friend, I'm guessing that you feel yourself a burden to others. So can I assure you that not only are you not a burden to me, I enjoy your company and we are, after all, supposed to be buddies."

Will soft frown was accompanied by an equally soft smile.

"Are you proposing friendship or a date, Doctor?" Will chuckled.

The question surprised Hannibal. He hadn't meant anything by it and had hoped he'd kept check of his interest since they shared a kiss. It made him wonder if Will was speaking more of his own wants.

He must have looked as caught off guard as he felt, because Will chuckled again and shook his head.

"I'm just teasing. This feels like a really strange conversation to be having in my bed."

"Perhaps I should do all my therapy sessions in a bed."

"It would certainly be a unique selling point."

They shared a smile and then Will rose from the bed, ending the conversation entirely.

*

Will felt strangely alone when he got home from retrieving his car.

Not in the same way that he had when his mother had died, or his father. Or even Randall. It was that feeling that came not with actually being alone, but with missing someone's company.

It was hard to deny he'd been enjoying Hannibal's company, glad that now - at least outside of the therapy session - they had settled into a rapport like that they had over the phone.

Saying goodbye when Hannibal had dropped him back to his car, had been difficult. He hadn't wanted to say goodbye, and he very nearly asked Hannibal if he wanted to go for dinner later that evening. Not as a date, but because it felt like something they could do as friends.

Or, maybe as a date?

He remembered the kiss they had shared before Will had flipped out. It had been good, he'd wanted more. But it wasn't that easy, he wasn't easy to be around. Hannibal didn't need an antisocial grump in his life. Which was crap, as Will couldn't stop imagining the two of them hiding away together in his secluded house. The two of them sharing his bed.

Damn.

He got a little hard thinking about all the different ways the night before or that morning could have unfolded. Ways he'd been determined not to let happen, and now he felt like an idiot for regretting that. Especially as he knew he had made the right decision then. Better to leave it at jerking off over thoughts of the man than risk just letting yet another person into his life that could leave like all the rest.

His mom, his dad, Randall, the string of ill fated relationships he'd had since college. Usually fizzled out after a few dates. Those that lasted a few months had ended up with Will pissing off perfectly nice people with his inability to be what they needed, whilst never allowing them to be what he needed.

Friends were few and far between too, so at least attempting to keep Hannibal as a friend was a better option. Not too close, but still a chance to enjoy his company.

Will cursed at himself for the mess his life was and let himself into his house. A place that the previous morning had been perfectly fine, but today it seemed to be missing something.

Hannibal.

*

Hannibal settled in his study and sipped at the wine he'd brought in with him, wondering if he should have something stronger.

He let out a sigh as he waited for his scheduled phone call, the one that their uncle allowed Mischa to make to him once a week. She had been a baby when their parents had died, almost twenty years between the siblings. His parents had had him young, and her when his mother had believed she no longer could. He loved her smiling face and the way her chubby fingers gripped his own.

The memories beyond that were barely there. A few from the times he had visited his aunt and uncle. No matter how he had tried to gain custody of her, no matter what he did, how well he made

his life, she was never allowed to come to him. Roberto did so much for her, he knew that, but he was her family more so than Roberto and Murasaki.

He had never given up. He had done everything his uncle requested to prove that he was fit for her to come to him. And now she had reached college age and he had collected information for many classes she might be interested in. If only he could bring her to him in America to study. If only Roberto would allow it.

As long as he didn't know that Bedelia had left, there was still a chance.

"Anniba," Mischa's delightful tone came down the telephone line. The name she had always called him, even after she could properly pronounce it.

"My darling sister," Hannibal breathed a sigh down the phone, so glad to hear her voice.

She began to talk to him about her schooling and his heart ached at the miles between them. Much, as he imagined, Will Graham's ached.

His loss in Bedelia was nothing compared to the losses Will had suffered and the resulting trauma, not that he could reveal that. But Hannibal did understand loss, he felt it keenly and constantly. Awaiting the day he could reunite with his sister.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will skip group...

It had been three days since the impromptu sleepover, and Will hadn't heard from Hannibal in that time.

To be fair, he hadn't contacted Hannibal either and, though they had parted with no awkwardness between them, Will couldn't help but worry that they had crossed a line for Hannibal. Or that they hadn't?

It wasn't like he was unaware that Hannibal was attracted to him, the man had kissed him after all. Will felt like he'd been clear, and whilst he could admit to himself that he'd have been hard pushed to resist had the doctor put the moves on him, Hannibal had seemed fine with the boundaries. And then, Will had told him *so much*. It hurt to think that he might be avoiding him now.

It hurt so much that he sent Hannibal a message.

First he wrote something that was confrontational and final, the sort of self sabotaging that came easy to him with friendships. Bev had been the only one to laugh it off and tell him to stop being an asshole, until he did. So, he took a moment to step back and imagine what Bev would say if he discussed it with her. And tempered his communication accordingly.

A simple, casual message. He'd tried to keep the tone jovial, but he had no idea how that actually came across, especially considering it was forced.

It was a few minutes after he'd sent the message jokingly asking whether Hannibal was avoiding him, that his phone rang.

Hannibal's name flashed up, and Will sucked in a breath, not sure he was really prepared to talk. But then, if Hannibal was avoiding him, he surely wouldn't have called.

"Detective Graham," Will answered gruffly, trying to tell himself it was also jokingly, but knew deep down he was trying to put up something of a barrier, despite his best intentions.

"Will," Hannibal practically sighed his name and it made Will's chest flutter. "I'm sorry if you felt neglected."

It was clear from his tone that Hannibal was completely serious, and contrite. Will felt bad for having said anything now. Hannibal was a busy man, and Will had made things weird, he was sure. Not that he was ready to admit to himself or Hannibal that three days had felt too long to go without the company of someone you enjoyed spending time with.

"Shit, I'm sorry. You must be busy. I just, um…" Will trailed off, not wanting to admit anything.

Perhaps Hannibal sensed that, because he rejoined easily, "Please know that were I not extremely busy the last few days, I would have contacted you often."

Will let out a grunt of acknowledgement and the line went quiet between them. The space filled by all the things they weren't saying.

Finally Hannibal said quietly, as though allowing himself to reveal this much, "I had some bad news, it has occupied much of my free time."

"Shit, is everything okay?" Will asked, his mind racing as to what it could be. A problem with a patient? Or something to do with his divorce? Or Mischa?

Will swallowed, the thought hurt his heart. He had experienced enough loss to not want it for anyone else. And especially, he realised, not for Hannibal.

"Not really," Hannibal finally said and laughed mirthlessly. There was silence for another few beats, before Hannibal asked, "Are you concerned as my buddy, Will? Or as my friend?"

It felt so leading, and yet Will instantly answered.

"As your friend,"

Another chuckle and then a sucked in breath. "I could use a friend right now." Hannibal said, a quiet lament.

"Do you…I can, um. Do you want me to come over?"Will offered and then cleared his throat, trying to shift the awkwardness of his words.

“No, it’s fine. I’m just making a fool of myself. Besides, it’s group night. I’ll see you there?” Hannibal replied, though his tone didn't sell it and Will was sure he wanted to go to group just about as much as Will did, which was not at all.

“If you want. Is that what you want, Hannibal? We could do that, we could carry on at group, or admit that maybe we can help each other beyond that? That our friendship is helping us?”

Will wasn't sure where the words came from, and though he did mean them, he hadn't planned them. But now his mind was filled with going to Hannibal, being with his friend in a time of need. It was something he'd rarely been compelled to do in the past.

"I shall send you my address," Hannibal answered.

*

Hannibal had scalded himself over his lack of contact with Will. It wasn't that he forgot him, simply that there was so much turmoil inside him that he had no capacity to see anyone. And the last time they had spoken Will had unburdened quite a lot. Hannibal had felt honoured to have those conversations, but he had no energy for more. Not since the news from Mischa.

The distance from Wolftrap allowed Hannibal time to clear up the kitchen and start on dinner in the expectation of Will staying for food although they hadn’t discussed it.

Thinking about it sent a thrill through him. Their conversation too, where they had mutually agreed to bypass group in order just to spend time alone together.

As friends, Hannibal reminded himself.

And, in truth, he needed a friend. Will had revealed so much of himself, much more than Hannibal was sure he had to anyone else. It felt natural that he do the same. He *wanted* to do the same.

His hands were clammy as he cooked and he let out a nervous breath. What if Will thought less of him if he told him the truth about the situation? About Bedelia?

The ring of the doorbell made Hannibal draw a sharp breath. He had busied himself with cooking the simple pasta dish that was now warming in the oven, that he hadn't noticed how quickly time had passed.

He removed his apron and moved steadily through the house to the front door, taking a deep, steadying breath, before opening it.

Hannibal ached, sure that he didn't imagine the way Will Graham's face lit up when he opened the door. The way he smiled so genuinely before realising and tempering it.

Hannibal had to hold back the words, wanting to tell the man before him that he'd missed him. Even though it had been only a few days. A few days since they had laid next to each other and discussed such personal information.

"Hey," Will greeted, his smile becoming lopsided as he waited on the stoop. "You going to let me in?"

Hannibal blinked, "Yes, of course." He stood aside and ushered Will in, taking his coat and hanging it before proceeding to the kitchen. "I made us a light dinner."

Will watched as he used the oven gloves to remove the dish from the oven and place it on the marble slab for cooling.

"Smells great, you didn't need to do that." Will said, looking a little sheepish at the effort Hannibal had gone to.

"It was no bother. It's a simple thing to cook for two rather than one." Hannibal smiled, "Just double the ingredients."

Will returned the fond smile and they gazed at each other for a long moment before Will cleared his throat and looked away.

"You're, uh, doing okay?" Will asked tentatively. And Hannibal wondered for a moment if Will thought it had all been a ruse to get him there.

He let out a sigh, "I'm… managing."

Will frowned. "You don't have to talk about it, this isn't group. We can just hang out if you like. But I'm happy to listen or… do anything I can."

Hannibal looked at Will then, and Will's expression and slight blush made clear that he hadn't meant for the offer to sound suggestive in anyway.

"That's kind of you, Will. I would like to talk with you, but I'll admit that I'm worried you'll think less of me." Hannibal said as he busied himself with plates, only turning back when Will let out a

warm chuckle.

“Hannibal, I had the same concerns if you recall. Besides, I’m pretty sure that unless you’re going to tell me you’re a cannibalistic serial killer, I’ll be able to handle it.”

Will’s gentle smile was so disarming.

“Are you hungry?” Hannibal asked.

“Not right now, let it cool.” Will said, and then took a step towards Hannibal, “Honestly, you can tell me Hannibal.”

Hannibal drew in a deep breath, as much in reaction to Will’s closeness to the discussion to come.

“Perhaps an aperitif in the study?” Hannibal asked, stepping away.

“Sure,” Will agreed, following behind.

*

Will hadn’t gone to Hannibal’s house with an ulterior motive.

He had been very clear with himself on that. They were just friends, a support network for each other. A paddle in the rough waters of avoiding group.

But this new vulnerable side to Hannibal made him want to draw the usually self assured doctor into his arms and hold him.

They sat on the overstuffed sofa in the study, a small glass in hand. Will waited as Hannibal took a sip and then looked away, as though studying the drapes.

“Hannibal…” Will coaxed gently. He didn’t want to push, but it was so clear that Hannibal wanted to talk to him.

Hannibal took a deep breath and then said coldly, with no preamble, “I won’t draw this out. My marriage was one of convenience.”

He left it at that and there was silence between them as Will took that in. He hadn’t been expecting it. He remembered how upset Hannibal had been when the divorce papers had arrived. Maybe they had started as a marriage of convenience but he had fallen in love with her? Why else would he come to the group?

“Green card?” Will finally asked. When Hannibal signed, he followed hastily with, “Off the record, I left my detective badge at home.”

Hannibal made a small appreciative, amused hum and took another deep breath before turning to Will.

“Sadly, nothing as simple as that.”

Will nodded, “And then it got complicated with love, right?”

Hannibal frowned, as though he didn't understand at first, and then realisation dawned. He shook his head, "We weren't in love. We were fond of each other, but there was no love between us."

Will hated the way that made him feel a little flutter in his chest that he definitely had no right to. He tried to avoid dwelling on the feeling by asking what seemed like an obvious question.

"If it was just for convenience and you didn't love each other, why did you join the group?"

Will was expecting the answer to be some sort of psychoanalytic nonsense, and was surprised when Hannibal looked at him very seriously and replied, "Pettiness. She started a relationship immediately, or as I have since discovered - concurrently. I wanted it to be clear in our social circles what she had done. I had never been anything but the perfect husband to her."

"Woah," Will was taken aback by the venom in Hannibal's words. And perhaps at that confession Will would have thought a little poorly of him. But there was more to it than that, Will knew. The reaction to the divorce, the way he was in group, there was something deeper that perhaps Hannibal wasn't even admitting to himself. Just as had been the case for Will.

"I've shocked you. My behaviour has been abhorrent." Hannibal looked a little ashamed and he started to rise as though to give Will space.

"Wait, no." Will said, taking hold of Hannibal's wrist. They stayed like that for a moment, the skin on skin contact freezing them both until Will drew him back to the sofa. "People can do ridiculous things when they are upset."

Will's hand remained gently holding Hannibal's wrist as they continued.

"I told you," Hannibal protested, almost wanting to be the villain, "It was an arrangement, there was no love. No heart to break. Only, ashamedly, my ego to bruise."

Will shook his head, "I don't buy it. I'm a good judge of people, Hannibal. And you might want to blame it all on a bruised ego, but you were hurt. I can see that. You wanted to confess this to me, but really, I think you need to deal with the pain."

They stared at each other for a long moment and then both broke into a chuckle.

"Why do I feel like I'm at group?" Hannibal replied jovially as he turned his hand in Will's grasp. Their palms slid together and fingers laced. Though neither of them commented on it.

"What happened? It wasn't a green card." Will prompted.

Hannibal sighed, "No. I have one of those on my own merit."

"You said it's complicated?"

Hannibal's hand tightened a little, and Will was surprised to see the pain in his face, the slight wetness to his eyes.

"I told you about my family, my sister."

"Mischa," Will agreed with a nod and the sound of her name brought a sad smile to Hannibal's lips. For a moment he feared the worst.

“She’s much younger than me, I was already off to college when my parents were blessed with her. She was always such a darling child. When they,” His voice choked a little and Will found himself squeezing his hand and moving a fraction closer. “When my parents died, I was a young man but I wanted to take her. She’s my sister and the only thing I have left of my parents. She had only just started to walk and talk and could barely even pronounce my name.” Hannibal let out a fond chuckle at the memories.

Will didn’t realise at first, his automatic reaction of resting his free hand on Hannibal’s knee and stroking it gently, supportively. Hannibal didn’t notice or at least didn’t comment on it.

“The state gave her to my uncle, in Paris. Deeming he and my aunt a better fit to raise a young baby. And at first I had understood the decision, as much as I disliked it. I visited as often as I could around my studies. Though my aunt and uncle, childless until now, didn’t particularly like my presence.”

“They wanted to raise her as their own?” Will asked.

“Perhaps. They are very possessive of her, though never encouraged her to call them mother and father, as far as I’m aware. But that is all with hindsight. Back then, weighed by grief for my parents as well, I allowed it. I decided to throw myself into my studies and make a living for myself so that once I had, she could come live with me and I could support her.”

Hannibal paused at the memories and Will found himself moving closer still, their legs pressed together in comfort.

“It never was enough. They had agreed, many times. Clearly to dismiss me. Every time I managed a better job, a higher position. Even after my parent’s estate was settled and I found myself with more than enough funds to support us both, as I’m sure they would have wished, I was not allowed her. They didn’t even trust to let her come and visit me, and I was increasingly unwelcome in their home. They said that I was a disruptive influence on her.”

Hannibal shook his head.

“We speak by phone once a week. But she writes me letters about how she misses me and wishes we could see each other more. Wishes she could come and stay with me. So a few years ago, I decided it was enough. I went to my uncle and told him that once she was college age, I would have her come to me and I would educate her over here. Send her to the best university, wherever she wanted to go.”

“He said no?” Will asked quietly, his heart aching with each new piece of information.

Hannibal let out a dark chuckle, “No. If he had I would have engaged a lawyer. Instead he agreed, but on one proviso. My aunt and uncle believe in the proper way to raise a child. We drew up a contract that when she reached college age, if I were married, providing a secure family home, then Mischa could come to me.”

“Damn, that’s… Why didn’t you just get a lawyer?” Will asked.

Hannibal turned and looked at him with sad eyes. “We are the only family she has. I didn’t want to break us all apart. I didn’t want us to fight over her. I wanted to spare her the legal battle and the heartache of it.”

“They used that against you,” Will muttered angrily.

“Yes.” Hannibal agreed, stroking his thumb over the back of Will’s hand.

“So you got married.” Will surmised.

“Yes. Bedelia was a long time colleague, a friend. I explained the situation, and she agreed to help. She was focused on her career and wished to take some advanced studies. It suited her to have the support of a husband in a comfortable situation and had no time for romantic inclinations, it was beneficial to us both.” Hannibal looked at Will with determination in his eyes, “She’s the only person other than yourself I have ever disclosed this to, Detective.”

Will smiled and nodded, stroking Hannibal’s leg again. “I won’t say anything.”

Hannibal smiled and nodded in return and they settled into silence for a moment, touching each other lightly.

It should have seemed odd. Friends didn’t commonly sit around touching each other like this did they? Or maybe they did? Reassuring little touches of support.

Will didn’t stop as he asked, “And now?”

Hannibal let out a sigh, “The bad news that I had on my call with Mischa. There is less than a year left before Mischa was to come to me, I had hoped to hide the divorce. But it would seem they keep up with Bedelia’s personal life on the internet, and didn’t miss the photos of her and her new partner. They are refusing to let Mischa come.”

Hannibal took in a shuddering breath.

“Oh fuck, Hannibal that’s…”

Hannibal shook his head, “I have a lawyer looking into it now. There may not be a way to spare her from a legal battle. She is an adult now and should be able to make her own choice to come, but she doesn’t wish to disappoint our uncle. He puts a lot on her, but breaks no laws. I feel helpless. I feel…”

“You’re grieving.” Will said, moving a hand up to gently stroke Hannibal’s face. “Not the marriage, but what it had represented, what it was going to facilitate. No wonder you acted petty. It wasn’t your ego bruised, Hannibal, it was your heart.”

"It was a lot to ask of anyone," Hannibal conceded, "But if only she'd been able to wait until Mischa was here before leaving me."

Will stopped speaking as he realised how close they now were, faces barely inches from each other and both taking deep breaths. He so desperately wanted to comfort Hannibal. He wanted to take his pain away and wished he knew how.

“Will…” Hannibal breathed out his name, not a question or a statement.

They leaned in at the same time, their lips coming together in a gentle press.

*

Hannibal pulled back to take in air, the kissing having become passionate and hungry. Their hands grabbing at each other's clothes.

"Will, we should consider this, before…"

Will shook his head, "Less talking."

Hannibal swallowed. Will clearly wanted to act and not speak of it, wanted to just be in the physical moment of it all and Hannibal knew he shouldn't allow it. That whatever this was needed to be discussed and decided upon. Would it damage their friendship? Would it start them on the path to more than friends? What did they both want out of it?

When Will kissed him again, Hannibal was helpless to refuse.

"Bedroom?" Will asked with a raspy voice as he rose from the sofa, pulling Hannibal up with him.

"Yes," Hannibal gasped, kissing Will again before they restrained themselves enough to get to the stairs and up to the master suite.

They were entwined with each other when they fell on the bed, no longer able to deny the attraction they both felt.

"Will you come for me, Hannibal? Forget about everything for a while and just let yourself feel pleasure?" Will asked as he lowered his mouth to suck and nip at Hannibal's throat.

Hannibal groaned, his cock thickening until it was impossibly hard and pressed to Will's hip.

Was that all it was? Will wanting to distract him with pleasure? He wasn't able to resist, regardless.

Hannibal nodded, emphatically, as Will started to grind against him, pausing only here and there to divest clothes.

By the time they were down to their underwear, Will had Hannibal on his back, fitting comfortably between his legs. He kissed Hannibal so passionately that it took his breath away. He was barely able to even make a sound when Will began rutting against him.

Their hard lengths found friction against each other, aided by the soft cotton of Will's boxers and the silk of his own.

"Oh fuck, Hannibal. You're so…" Will never finished his comment, gently biting down on Hannibal's shoulder instead as they wrapped their arms tight around each other and rocked back and forth.

Will came with a grunt only moments before Hannibal cried out his own release. They continued to rock gently through their shared climax, and then to hold each other tightly as they caught their breath.

Will didn't say anything then. Not for the rest of the evening, as they pulled off their soiled underwear and dropped it to the floor. Nor when they got under the bedcovers and ignored the food cooling downstairs. Nor when they looked at each other lovingly and stroked each other's face and hair and continued to share sweet and gentle kisses until they eventually drifted off to sleep wrapped in each other's arms.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Will needs distance, Hannibal needs to get remarried.

It had been two months since Hannibal had seen or heard from Will Graham.

After their evening of pleasure, he had awoken in the morning to find Will hurriedly dressing. When he had tried to pull him back to the bed, Will had pulled away.

“You’re someone used to being in a relationship, used to this. I’m not. I’m not even sure I want it.” Will had spat, pulling on his trousers.

“I’m sorry if I overwhelmed you, Will. After last night I had thought…” Hannibal had started, sitting up in the bed and trying to find what words he needed to say to make it right. After the amazing night they had shared and with everything now in the open between them, this was unexpected,

“It was just sex, Hannibal. Not a marriage proposal.” Will had snapped, before leaving the room, followed shortly thereafter with the sound of the front door opening and closing behind him.

He answered no calls or messages, and Hannibal suspected he might have even blocked his number, but didn’t want to go to the desperate lengths of calling from another number. After a few messages and two voicemails, Hannibal stepped back. Feeling it unfair to force attention that was obviously unwanted.

He had not turned up to the group the following week and Alana had informed him that Will definitely wasn’t returning.

Hannibal didn’t either. It seemed like a pointless pursuit.

If Will didn’t wish to see him anymore, whether he understood the reasoning or not, he had to respect it.

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Will messaged Bev in the morning saying he couldn't make their usual lunch date, to which he received a barrage of rant-infused messages saying this was the second time he'd cancelled and if he did it again she'd simply turn up at the Academy.

He let out a sigh.

She likely suspected why he was avoiding her. He'd quit group and really didn't want to tell her that. Despite knowing that she would likely be sympathetic if he explained everything that happened. Not that he was entirely certain of that himself. What *had* happened?

He had spent an amazing evening with Hannibal. There had been many layers of bliss and happiness that he hadn't had in a long time. Some he wasn't sure he'd ever experienced before.

But it had all been too much. They had shared so much deep and emotional information about themselves. And then the sex? The memory of it made Wll shiver. It made him feel simultaneously nervous and lonely.

It had all been too much and he'd freaked out. Hannibal hadn't deserved that, but Will had let his emotions and fears consume him and he had reacted poorly. And yet at the root of all of it, the only thing on Will's mind, was how long it would be before he lost Hannibal. If he let him close, if they explored this thing between them and started to actually see each other, maybe even start a relationship? How long before Hannibal left or worse? And then Will would be all the more devastated. He couldn't take anymore, as was surely clear from his reaction to Randall's death.

All the same, he felt terrible about how he had spoken to Hannibal and how he had left. He'd been tempted more than once to message and apologise for that part at least, perhaps reply to one of Hannibal's messages he'd sent in the beginning. He had hesitated too long, not trusting himself to just reply and not give in to more, and now that he felt more stable it was too late.

A self fulfilling prophecy, he huffed at the thought. But was self aware enough to see the seeds of truth in it. He would always lose people so long as he continued to push them away, but at least the loss would be less painful if he did it sooner rather than later. Surely?

But, if that was the case, why did cutting Hannibal off hurt so much?

*

Hannibal would like to pretend that his thoughts weren't still largely consumed by Will, even three months after their last encounter, but he couldn't.

He missed him. More than was reasonable, he was sure.

They still hadn't spoken since that last night, but after the time spent getting to know each other on that intimate night together, he was difficult to forget.

And, truth was, Hannibal didn't want to forget him,

Hannibal was startled from his thoughts by the ringing of his phone. He was standing at his kitchen counter preparing vegetables and it took little effort to clean his hands with a cloth before picking up the phone.

"Lecter," A voice greeted down the line.

Hannibal instantly recognised it as that of his lawyer, Margot Verger from Verger & Verger, a family firm that he had done business with for years.

"Any news?" He kept his tone level but her amused huff let him know she knew how anxious for results he was.

"Possibly," She replied. "The contract is pretty tight, if you want to abide by it."

Hannibal let out a sigh, "If Mischa comes of her own volition she would not outrun our uncle's reach and influence. If he wanted her home, he'd make her, adult or no. If it's by his own contract

then he cannot fight it. It would be my first choice."

Margot gave a thoughtful hum, though he knew she was expecting that answer. They'd been over it many times before, she knew all this already.

“Okay, well I guess I knew you were going to say that.” She confirmed with a sigh.

“Margot?” Hannibal frowned, uncertain and a little concerned about where this was going.

“Here’s the thing. I kind of found a loophole, of sorts. I was looking at first to see what impact the divorce would have, now that it’s finalised.”

Hannibal’s stomach swooped at the words and he swallowed, a strange nervous energy at the reminder that the divorce had been agreed and settled a couple of months before. Part of him still missed Bedelia, or at least, sharing his life with someone. He missed the domesticity, even if they had only just been playing at it.

He wondered if he should feel bad about not missing her as a person. They had been friends for a long time, but she hadn’t left the hole in his life he thought she might.

“Is there an impact?”

“Yes and no. I went over the information, every word again and again. And then it dawned on me what was missing. It never at any point says you need to be married to the same person continuously.”

Hannibal blinked. “You mean, I could… If I remarried before Mischa starts college, then it would still count.”

“Well, yeah. According to the contract. I’m not sure your uncle would see it that way, but it’s here in black and white. He can blame the lawyer that drew this up if he has an issue with it. But, needless to say, your getting divorced doesn’t mean game over. It does mean that you have,” she paused as though calculating the timings, “a little over six months to marry someone else. Perhaps not too realistic.”

Hannibal swallowed and let out a sigh. “No, perhaps not.”

He was glad he hadn’t got his hopes up in the least. And it did nothing but flush a new wave of anger through him at Bedelia. He felt for her, of course he did, he knew how hard it was to live a lie. But it had been necessary for him.

“Thank you for your efforts, Ms Verger.”

“Sure,” Margot acknowledged. Hannibal was about to hang up when she said, “There was just one more thing. Probably doesn’t make much difference.”

“Yes?” Hannibal asked, no hope remaining, as was clear in his tone.

“It actually doesn’t state anywhere in the contract that you have to marry a woman.”

“I… I don’t understand?” Hannibal felt an uncomfortable warmth in his chest, and anxious flush up his throat. “It says…”

“Granted there is a mixed use of plural and feminine pronouns. But it actually never states explicitly, female. Or wife. It just refers to a marriage.” Margot explained.

“What does that mean?” Hannibal blinked, trying to take it in. Feeling the pressure of years wasted. How he could have lived as himself all this time after all. It was a cruel thing to realise.

“Technically, you could marry a man. If it was contested it wouldn’t take much to argue the point and get it overturned. I think your uncle needs a better lawyer.” Margot chuckled. “Anyway, I thought I should just let you know everything I found. Let me know if I can assist any further.”

“Thank you,” Hannibal repeated, numb and dazed. He hung up the phone with a shaking hand.

All this time. All these years wasted, when he could have been himself and his uncle wouldn’t have been able to do a thing about it.

He balled his fist and slammed it on the countertop. He should have had the contract more thoroughly inspected before. He'd had it checked for the tightness of it, to ensure his uncle would be bound by it. And Bedelia had agreed to marry him and there had seemed no need to delve any further. What a fool he had been.

And yet…

There was part of him that couldn’t be sorry. The part that knew that he would never have met Will Graham had he known it all from the beginning.

*

Will paused at his office door, seeing the figure inside. He wasn’t expecting anyone, so let out a sigh at the thought of it being a student. He was already completely fried and had marking he needed to do before going home and starting his weekend. Which would mostly involve more marking, and hopefully, an afternoon of fishing.

He opened the door and started into the room, “My office hours are on Mon-”

Will stopped and drew a sharp breath.

“Hello, Will.”

Will huffed the breath back out again, closed the door behind him and moved around his desk. He placed down his papers and took a seat without looking up from them.

“What do you want, Hannibal?” His heart hurt even as he said the words, cold and hard. Perhaps even harsh. A renewed sense of not wanting to let him close. He had been doing so well.

Well, that was a lie.

He had barely been doing okay, he’d just got better at hiding it for the sake of not losing Bev. He ached for the loss of Hannibal, but just assumed that at some point he’d get over it. Like he had his other losses. This just meant he spent an awful lot of time trying to ignore something he’d got a sense of from Hannibal - that the problem really was that he wasn’t getting over these losses at all. And like it or not, Hannibal was already one of them, as much as he'd tried to protect himself.

“I’m sorry to ambush you this way, Will. But I needed to see you and wasn’t sure you would take my call. I thought you might have blocked my number.” Hannibal said, tentatively.

“I… I didn’t block it. I got your messages.” Will hadn’t meant it to sound harsh, and yet it came out that way.

“I see.” Hannibal replied, a trace of hurt in his cold tone.

Will clenched his jaw and then took off his glasses to rub his eyes. This was stress he could do without. It was a heartache he could do without.

“That makes what I have come here to ask, perhaps a little more awkward.” Hannibal mumbled.

Will frowned and looked up at him, brows knitting together.

Hannibal let out a heavy sigh and said with the faint trace of a smile, “I came to ask you to marry me.”

*

Will dropped heavily into the passenger seat of Hannibal's Bentley and closed the door with more force than strictly necessary. He wasn't going to have this conversation on the Academy campus. Whatever this nonsense was.

They had been silent on the walk to Hannibal's car, and Will was trying to work out if the man was completely unhinged or having a joke at Will's expense. Neither, or rather both, seemed as likely as the other.

Hannibal got in and closed his own door, putting the key in the ignition when Will said, "No. We're not going anywhere. I just wanted privacy. This will do."

He could hear the uncontrolled anger in his own voice.

Hannibal's jaw clenched then relaxed and he gave a curt nod.

"Of course, Will. I apologise-"

Will held up his hand, "Just… get on with it. What is this nonsense?"

Hannibal let out a heavy sigh and seemed, actually, pretty upset.

"Hannibal, what is it?" His tone was softer, and he wasn't sure if he was happy about that.

"I spoke to my lawyer. There are some interesting aspects about the contract with my uncle that I hadn't before known."

Will's heart was in his throat at the thought of another obstacle between Hannibal and his sister. Hannibal turned to look at him with a soft gaze, letting out another deep breath before continuing again.

"The contract doesn't disallow remarrying. And… Nor does it explicitly state that it must be a marriage to a woman."

Will blinked, trying to take it all in.

"Hannibal, how… How are you only just discovering this? How…"

Hannibal shook his head slightly, "An oversight. The spirit of the contract is that I marry a woman, have a 'traditional' marriage. But it would appear that is not the letter of the contract. I didn't question it further at the time, I was desperate and Bedelia was there. My lawyer only realised the inconsistency in the language used in the contract that would allow this, when she was trying to see if we could mitigate the impact of my divorce."

Will let out a heavy, long breath. "Wow. That's... a lot."

Hannibal nodded, "Yes, and so now I still have a chance to honour the contract and save my sister from the heartache of something more aggressive."

"You think your uncle will allow it?" Will raised a brow.

Hannibal shook his head ever so slightly. "He won't like it, I'm sure. But he can't fight his own contract."

Will scrubbed his hands roughly over his face, leaving them there as he asked, "Why me?" He removed his hands slowly but continued to look forward out of the window and not to Hannibal. Not entirely sure he wanted to know the answer.

"Will," Hannibal breathed out his name with something between longing and sorrow. "I… Don't want to pull more people into this. My uncle mustn't suspect that it is a marriage of convenience, he has to believe it or he *will* fight it. With you, we already have something of a, uh, history. You already know about the situation, and we have a reasonable backstory. That we met at group and…"

He trailed off, and sighed again. Will could hear the desperation there.

"Fell in love?" Will huffed the words, the venom in his tone dying even as he said them.

"I've missed you, Will." Hannibal said quietly.

Will let out a sigh, this was all a massive mind fuck that he just didn't need.

Will shook his head, "I can't, Hannibal. I can't do this."

Hannibal closed his eyes and nodded, "I'm sorry, Will. I should never have asked. I am grasping at straws."

There was a part of Will that was filled with rage, angry that this situation existed, that he'd met Hannibal at all. That Hannibal had asked this. Even a little mad at Bev for forcing him into the coping with loss group in the first place.

But a larger part of him was filled with sympathy for Hannibal. More than that, he cared about the man on some level. He couldn't help returning to previous thoughts he'd had, months before. That he desperately wished there was something he could do to help with Mischa.

It was that reason, and that reason alone Will tried to convince himself, that he finally replied, "Give me a couple of days to think about it."

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Wedding preparations begin, including kissing practice.

Hannibal tempered the smile that was threatening to spread across his face, his chest warm and breath a little short as he evaluated his soon to be husband.

"Is this necessary?" Will grumbled, pulling at his collar.

Hannibal didn't miss the way his tailor's eyes narrowed, and certainly the man didn't seem as keen on Will as Hannibal was. Not that he blamed him, this was the third suit they'd tried and Will hated all of them. At least this was the difficult part, choosing the pattern and cut, the fittings for the custom suit would hopefully be a lot less painful for all involved.

"We're getting married, Will. You can't exactly turn up in a plaid shirt and mud covered boots." Hannibal teased.

Will scowled at him and the tailor tssked.

From years having honed fake marriage, Hannibal automatically closed the space between himself and Will, sliding a hand around his waist.

"Though I'm sure you'll look fetching in anything, darling." Hannibal purred the words and pressed a kiss to the rough stubble on Will's cheek. This came much easier than it ever had with Bedelia, and not just because Will was a man, but because Hannibal felt a genuine attraction and affection.

Will on the other hand?

He stiffened for a moment before letting out a disgruntled huff. He didn't pull away though, obviously realising there was always going to be a need to put on a show when out in public, and not just on their wedding day..

"I just think eloping would make things a lot easier." Will grumbled and pulled slowly away, starting to undo the jacket.

Hannibal hummed, "Perhaps, but I don't think that would be appreciated by our friends and family. In fact I think Mischa might be particularly unhappy with you. She's looking forward to meeting you, Will."

Will's lips tweaked into a slight smile and Hannibal knew that it was a mutual feeling.

"She's coming then?"

Hannibal let out a heavy sigh and moved forward, helping Will out of the jacket.

"I sent the invitation, she wants to come, but I have yet to hear anything from my uncle, and I am sure he will have much to say on the subject."

Will let out a sigh as well and nodded.

A little over three weeks ago they hadn't been talking, and last week Hannibal had sent out the wedding invites to the event due to take place in two months time. No time to waste, they had at least been able to sell it to friends and colleagues as having clicked at group and it had developed from there. Neither of them wanted to wait, they knew this was the real thing, and wanted to commit to each other.

Hannibal was sure that most in his social circle assumed that they were marrying as Will was insecure about Hannibal having been previously married. He wasn't sure if Will would be angry or amused to know that.

Will huffed, "I don't like this fabric, it's too stiff. Starchy."

Hannibal watched as he started to remove the shirt, mesmerised by Will's beautiful flesh. At least he didn't have to pretend on that front.

Will let out a deflated sigh and Hannibal swallowed. Perhaps they would have done this all differently if it were real?

He knew it was unfair to put Will in such a position, but thinking only of how they would behave as a real couple, Hannibal moved closer again. He took the shirt from Will and began to fold it, before leaning in and placing a very light kiss on Will's bare shoulder, "What would you like, mylimasis? Elopement is not an option, but if you wish to wear muddy boots?"

He could feel Will trying to not tense at the touch, and he shook his head at the words.

"No, it's okay, Hannibal. You're right we need the penguin suits."

The tailor grumbled and walked away, as Hannibal chuckled.

"The fact that you are referring to them in such a way, leads me to believe that you would prefer an alternative." When Will didn't respond, he took another step, taking advantage of their current privacy and - therefore unnecessarily - leaning into Will. "The important thing is that we are married, not what we wear." He breathed the words next to Will's ear and felt Will shudder.

Will trembled as he breathed out, and Hannibal couldn't help the way the response made his pulse race.

"You make it sound like this isn't all fake." Will replied.

There was no bite or malice to the words, but Hannibal felt stung nonetheless and stepped back, putting space between them again.

"I'm just thinking of your comfort." Hannibal dismissed with a smile, despite the ache in his chest. "Perhaps we can visit a shop you'd prefer?"

Will eyed him for a moment, as though unsure whether he meant it, then gave a curt nod of acceptance.

*

Hannibal's suit was to be made to measure, but Will took his home in a bag from the mall. An understated navy blue suit off the rack. It might not match Hannibal's dress suit, but he'd be comfortable.

Which was something he hadn't been all day.

Between the suit shopping and Hannibal's overly familiar behaviour, it was bordering on exhausting. He understood the need for them to keep up appearances, but it was still so new to him. He'd never really had this before, real or not.

And the constant reminders that his brain threw up that it was fake, just made it all the more difficult.

They arrived home and Will took his things straight to his room.

Home.

At first he thought he'd never settle in Hannibal's palatial house. With all the old trinkets and expensive mod cons. He thought he'd miss his own little house. And he did, but it wasn't like he couldn't go there. It was still his.

They had agreed that to make this work they needed to live together, otherwise no one would believe they were getting married so soon. And Will had agreed with that.

At first, he had still stayed at his house some nights, when he worked late. When it was justifiable that the commute to Hannibal's was a little long. And yet, that had gotten less and less, and more often than not he was sleeping in the comfortable, if simple, room that Hannibal had provided for him.

He tried not to think too much about the fact that it wasn't for the room, or even the house and its comforts that he returned there each evening. It was to be with Hannibal. To indulge in their casual domesticity, the routines they had fallen into.

Filleting the fish as Hannibal prepared the vegetables. Cooking side by side, eating at the kitchen counter because Will refused to eat in the dining room that was meant for more people than he would comfortably dine with.

But that comfort had become overwhelming in the course of the shopping trip. The reality of what they were doing. Or the unreality.

Will placed the bags down on his bed and went to the window, looking out over the garden as he let out a sigh. It wasn't the same as his woods.

And right then all he could think of was walking in them with Randall.

And why? All because of how Hannibal had acted with him whilst they shopped. He had been expecting it of course, it wasn't like they hadn't discussed it. But at home they had become easy and casual around each other. He enjoyed Hannibal's company, and frankly was glad that there was no expectation of intimacy.

Whilst he couldn't deny that this situation could offer that potential, he wasn't ready for it. And wasn't sure he ever would be. He was sure Hannibal would be accomodating, and he had himself thought that he might use the situation to have a closeness he craved, with no strings.

But the reality had not proved so simple.

Because he liked Hannibal. And every day they spent time together and grew closer and he knew that if they were intimate in any way, even just behaving at home in the way he knew they must behave in public, it would be too much. He wasn't sure there was a way back from that.

And then when this was all over and Mischa was here. When he was no longer needed, he would lose Hannibal as he had lost everyone else in the past. Thinking he could cope with that if they became intimate, was a mistake.

The light knock at his door surprised Will. Hannibal usually left him to himself, and never disturbed him when he was in his room. Apparently considering it a necessary private space.

Before Will could move, Hannibal's voice, quiet and concerned, filtered through the closed door.

"Are you alright, Will? Can I get you something?"

Will recognised the tremor there and winced. He didn't want to think Hannibal had done something wrong. They had both agreed to this, consented to it. They both knew what it would involve, what they had to sell to other people.

Will let out a sigh and went to the door.

He opened it and tried to pull on a reasonably convincing smile. "I'm fine, just tired."

"Will," Hannibal released his name on a sigh and the concern was there in his furrowed brow. "I pushed it too far today." It came out like an apology.

Will shook his head, "No, it's fine. It was just… a lot. I'll do better, I'll try." Will reassured.

Hannibal huffed a sigh and shook his head, "No, Will. I don't want you to be uncomfortable. I will be more mindful of-"

"Hannibal," Will cut him off. "How the hell will we sell this to people if I flinch away? We should be doing it more, not less. And I'm sorry, I'm the problem here. You have nothing to apologise for."

Will could feel his whole body shaking as he reached out his hand and took Hannibal's.

"Here," He gently pulled Hannibal into the room and placed Hannibal's hand on his waist. "We need to get used to each other."

"We've been intimate before," Hannibal countered.

Will chuckled at that and shook his head. "We've kissed and rutted like teenagers, that's hardly-"

"I meant when we slept in each other's arms." Hannibal corrected, his eyes fixed on Will's.

Will blinked and swallowed, not letting those memories in. Hannibal was right of course. It was the most intimate Will had been with someone in longer than he could remember, perhaps at all. And

he couldn’t let himself be that vulnerable.

He started to back away from Hannibal, but Hannibal took a step to follow him.

“It’s alright, Will. I already agreed that we would avoid such intimacies. But you’re right. We need to be accustomed to each other.” Hannibal moved his free hand to cup Will’s face and ran his thumb over Will’s lower lip.

It was all Will could do not to run away. Or shiver. Melt in his arms.

“Perhaps tomorrow we can spend the day together? A walk in the woods? Something away from here but not entirely public, so that we might learn how to handle each other?”

Will nodded and swallowed.

Hannibal smiled softly and released him. He turned and walked to the door but turned back once more to say for an innumerable time, “Thank you for doing this, Will. I can truly never thank you enough.”

When Hannibal left the room, Will let out a shuddering breath and took a seat on the bed. Tomorrow was something to anticipate and to dread.

*

They took Will's truck. Will had insisted, joking that he wouldn't want to get the Bentley muddy going up the secluded roads to the forest trail. But Hannibal suspected it was more than that. If Will wanted to drive so that he had control over their comings and goings, if that made him more comfortable? Hannibal was more than happy to indulge.

He knew this had been increasingly difficult for Will, and wanted to accommodate him as much as possible.

When they got to the small parking area that serviced this section of the forest, Will killed the engine and sat looking out the window for a moment. Collecting himself together it would seem, and so Hannibal let himself out of the vehicle, hoping to give him some space.

Will took a minute and then climbed out himself, he grabbed their jackets from the back and passed Hannibal's to him. They donned them in silence and then stood ready to walk. With Will not moving, Hannibal took the lead, moving over to him and holding out his hand.

Will sucked in a breath and hesitated for a moment before taking his hand.

Will's palm was slightly clammy and he didn't seem entirely comfortable. But they had to persevere. If it wasn't necessary, if there wasn't so much at stake, then he wouldn't do this. He wouldn't ask Will to do this.

"Alright, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Will's jaw clenched but then he let out a self deprecating chuckle, "Don't mind me, this is ridiculous."

"Holding hands?"

"No," Will chuckled again then sighed, "My reaction to it. I'm not… I've not had much-"

"You don't need to explain yourself," Hannibal squeezed his hand, reassuringly, "I'm sorry we're having to do something that makes you so uncomfortable."

"Not, um, uncomfortable." Will started but then stopped and cleared his throat, looking over to the nearest walking trail.

Hannibal took the hint and began to walk. They took a slow pace and continued to hold hands, though they didn't talk at first. It took another ten minutes before Will seemed to relax a little and they began to make conversation about the forest. About the birds.

Hannibal was gratified to feel Will relaxing by increments, his hand less clammy. By the time they reached the overlook above the river, not even consciously heading in that direction, they were taking easily, gentle smiles between them. It seemed almost real.

And then they got to the overlook.

There was a couple standing there looking down at the river, a dog sniffing around at their feet. They were talking too quietly for Hannibal to make out what they were saying but they were clearly very comfortable with each other, in a way he and Will were yet to fully mimic.

They noticed Will and Hannibal, smiling good naturedly at them before starting back on the trail with their dog sniffing behind them as they went.

Hannibal couldn't pretend that he didn't feel the way Will froze. Was it encountering other people, being observed? Or was it the reminder on seeing them, that they still didn't have it quite right?

Either way, Hannibal felt compelled to say, "It's alright, Will."

Will let out a huff and nodded, all the same he allowed Hannibal to lead him up to the edge of the overlook until they were leaning against the metal railing that served as a barrier between the path and the drop below.

He decided to change tack a little, because this was getting them nowhere. He released Will's hand and very gently, very slowly, pulled Will to him until they were stood a breath apart.

"Can I kiss you, Will?" Hannibal rumbled the question, and whilst he desperately wanted to kiss the man again, it was also a necessity of this fiction. There would be a time when they would need to really do this in public, not least at their own wedding.

And Will knew that too. He gave a slight sigh and then a barely there nod. Hannibal could feel him trembling as he pressed their lips together.

There were no tongues involved but it wasn't exactly chaste either. Enough to pass as a couple, that was for sure.

They both pulled back at the same time and Will chuckled, though it seemed slightly forced.

"I think that went well," Hannibal smiled and Will hummed his agreement before starting back on the path, holding out his hand for Hannibal to take again.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

The engagement party, and the aftermath.

Whilst they quickly and easily became adept at kissing in public, they maintained a distance at home. One that Will knew he was responsible for. One that he needed.

That kiss out on their walk a couple of weeks earlier, and all of them since, hadn't been anything like the ones before. The first couple of times they'd kissed had been driven by lust. Of course there was an attraction there that went beyond the physical, but those kisses had been focused on the physical.

But now?

Will looked in the mirror as he adjusted his shirt, still trying to decide if he should wear a tie or not. It felt like he probably should, given that the event seemed a little more formal than he'd like. But it was his engagement party, so surely he could wear what he pleased?

He decided to forgo the tie, but still didn't move from the mirror.

He couldn't escape the thoughts of those kisses, and the inevitable ones to come this evening. There was something in them that was beyond lust. Ever since the walk, the kisses had been intimate in a way that Will hadn't expected. Not even necessarily arousing - though he had to admit on occasion they had been.

When he and Hannibal kissed, it felt real. And that hurt more than Will liked. He knew there was always the risk that this would become too much of an emotional investment, but there was part of him that wanted to explore that option. Just to experience the intimacy and closeness he craved, already knowing it had a shelf life, already knowing that he was going to lose Hannibal at some point.

Maybe he should discuss it with Hannibal?

The thought sent a shiver through him that was closer to fear than anticipation. That Hannibal would decide it would be better if they dialled back the affection.

It was the shake that Will needed to pull himself away from the mirror and start downstairs where he could already hear guests arriving.

And when he did… His heart skipped a beat.

Hannibal stood entertaining some guests, looking dashing in a three piece suit. But it wasn't that which knocked the breath from Will's lungs, it was the way Hannibal looked up and smiled at him.

If he hadn't known this was all fake, he'd have totally believed at that moment that Hannibal Lecter was in love with him.

He excused himself and drifted through the crowd to meet Will at the bottom of the stairs.

"You look very handsome," Hannibal told him, leaning close.

Will let out a shaky laugh, "Yeah, I should have worn a tie."

"Nonsense," Hannibal muttered next to his ear and then leaned closer. With no tie holding his collar together, Hannibal was able to nose the material aside and gently kiss Will's neck.

That they hadn't practiced for, and it took everything in Will not to whimper in reaction.

"Fuck," Will breathed out the word, only loud enough for Hannibal to hear. At which he pulled back and they separated.

Will gasped a breath, his face heating. Not least because of the looks from around the room that it was impossible to miss. Those sort of adoring looks people gave when they thought a couple was being especially sweet.

If only they knew.

But knew what? That Will refused to admit to himself that he longed for Hannibal to kiss him like that all the time. That this was fake? Or exactly how fake it really wasn't. Something Will was hiding from himself too.

Will cleared his throat and Hannibal chortled at the little ahhs and oohs from around the room.

"You'll have to excuse us, we've already started the honeymoon period." Hannibal chuckled and the room chuckled back.

He took Will's hand and led him into the throng as people went back about their business.

Will looked around, gripping tighter to Hannibal's hand than he intended, in a sea of strangers. This was by far at the limits of his comfort, and if it wasn't for the sake of appearances, for selling this, then he'd have drawn the line. But they had to do this.

"Alana, so glad you could make it." Hannibal brought them to a stop in front of the therapist.

She beamed at them and took in the sight of them.

"Oh my goodness. I can't say I wasn't surprised by the invitation, but you do make a handsome couple. I guess this is why you never returned to group." There was a light scalding in her tone.

"Yes, well," Hannibal started with a chuckle, squeezing Will's hand reassuringly. "It just sort of happened and then," He leaned a little closer to Alana as though imparting a secret, "We preferred to spend the time alone."

She chuckled lightly and shook her head, "Well, this has to be a first for me."

"Neither of us had anticipated finding love in group therapy," Hannibal answered for both of them. And whilst Will was glad that he didn't have to make conversation, he also felt as strange sourness

in the pit of his stomach at Hannibal's words. Lying to Alana, someone he actually knew, left him feeling bad in a way he;d never felt before.

The whole situation was a little too much.

"If you would excuse us for now, Alana." Hannibal said as he squeezed Will's hand again, "There are a few other people we must say hello to."

"Of course!" She replied and flourished her hand indicating for them to leave.

Will could see Bev was over by the table full of nibbles, and half expected they would go to her next. And dreaded it. Of course, he had told her the same as they'd told everyone else. And lying to his best friend was something he hated doing. This was so much worse than when he had not gone to therapy when she'd asked.

But, he reminded himself, this was what he had signed himself up for. To help Hannibal out.

Instead of moving towards Bev, Hannibal steered them to the corner of the room, still in sight but away from the small crowds.

"Will, you're having difficulties," Hannibal addressed and Will couldn't help but notice in that moment quite how sweaty his palms bad become. It was amazing that Hannibal had held onto his hand at all.

Will let out a shuddering breath but shook his head. "It's fine. Sorry, I'll do better."

"Will," Hannibal breathed out his name and moved in towards him.

Before Will could say or do anything, Hannibal enveloped him in his arms, muttering next to his ear, "I didn't mean to sound like I was reprimanding. Quite the opposite. Please relax."

Hannibal nuzzled against his neck once more and planted a kiss there, "Is there something I can do to help you relax?" Hannibal purred the words.

"Hannibal, fuck," Will reprimanded. "What is this?"

"I need you to relax, they think we're engaged. If we are over here making out like teenagers, no one will come and bother us."

At that Will let out a chuckle, and shook his head, "You can't be serious? Either way, we can't stay here all night."

"On the contrary," Hannibal breathed the words against his neck, making Will's knees weak. "It's our engagement party, we can stay here as long as we please."

"Yeah, it is…" Will agreed, breathless.

Hannibal pulled back a little, enough to move and his lips to find Will's. Will's that had been seeking his in return. The kiss was slow and sensual and Will could feel his cock twinging with interest, despite his best efforts.

But at that moment, he was carried away. There was no room of people, just the two of them, and this wasn't a lie.

He groaned and opened to Hannibal, who hummed in response and deepened the kiss, moving to press Will against the wall. Will wanted to melt.

"Damn, get a room!" Bev Katz chuckled from behind them and Will quickly pulled away, the spell broken.

There was a look across Hannibal's face. Something like bliss, replaced quickly by annoyance and then a plastered on smile as he turned.

"You must be Ms Katz." Hannibal growled, whilst Bev simply looked at them with a shit eating grin.

*

Hours of small talk later, Hannibal could tell that Will was completely worn out.

He'd done so well and Hannibal would call himself proud, if it didn't sound so condescending. But he *was* exceedingly proud, whether he could say it aloud or not.

"What?" Will asked brusquely from where he sat at the kitchen counter. He was nursing a glass of whiskey and dressed only in a t-shirt and boxers. His usual sleep wear that he had long since become comfortable wearing around the house.

"Will?"

"You're watching me. You want some whiskey?" Will's reply was gruff, defensive.

And Hannibal realised that yes, indeed he had been watching Will from the doorway.

"No, thank you. Sorry, I was just thinking of how well you did this evening."

Will turned to look at him and raised a brow, as though telling him not to be so patronising.

Hannibal chuckled and shook his head. "It's been a long evening."

"Yeah," Will sighed and went back to his drink.

"I know it is difficult for you. But now, there is just the wedding and-"

Will let out another heavy sigh. "The wedding." He knocked back the last of his drink and then put his head in his hands.

Hannibal frowned and moved to the counter, stepping next to Will and placing a hand on the base of his back. Will froze for a moment and then relaxed into the comfort of the touch.

"Will, I-"

Hannibal was interrupted by the sound of his phone beeping. With a cocked brow he removed it from his pocket and looked at the unexpected message. Not something he would normally do, but he hadn't looked at it all evening, and was very aware of that and that Mischa might have tried to contact him in that time to give her congratulations.

Hannibal read the message and took a sharp breath. Will looked quickly up at him.

“What is it? Is it Mischa?”

“No, no… Nothing like that. It’s… It’s Bedelia.” Hannibal blew out a breath and read over the message again. “I thought it courteous to contact her recently and let her know that I was remarrying. Of course, I gave her the same story we have given everyone else, though I know that she likely suspects otherwise, knowing as much as she does.”

“She messaged you?”

Hannibal blinked, surprised but somewhat excited by the tone in Will’s voice, the expression on his face. He seemed angry, perhaps even jealous, as much as he tried to hide it.

Hannibal tried not to read anything more into that than whatever hostile feelings Will felt on his behalf towards Bedelia.

“With her good wishes. And, an apology. For everything. She says she is glad I found someone else and that I can finally be myself.” Hannibal closed his phone and placed it on the counter. He appreciated the sentiment. It was kind of her.

“Shit,” Will huffed and shook his head. “I can’t do this. I…”

“Will?”

Will took in a deep breath and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don’t know what’s right. Marrying you so that your sister can come here, or… I don’t know. I’m just trapping you. What if you met someone, what if you’re missing the chance at happiness because I-”

“Will! Stop. If anything, it’s the other way around. I question every day if I can do this to you. But it’s for a short time. In the big scheme of things. Maybe a year or two.”

Will let out a shaky breath and nodded. He poured himself another drink and turned back to the counter.

"It had been a mistake with Bedelia to begin our ruse so far in advance of Mischa going to college."

Will didn't reply. There was some sort of unreadable hurt in his expression.

Hannibal started to loosen his tie, noticing how the action drew Will's eyes for a moment. But then his expression became a scowl.

The silence was oppressive.

“I’m going to have a shower and then turn in.” Hannibal told him, but Will didn’t respond.

*

Will had another glass of whiskey before heading up the stairs.

He paused when he got to the top, hearing the shower running in Hannibal’s ensuite.

His heart hurt so much. The evening had been just too much. He wasn’t sure how the hell he was going to get through the wedding. It was a month away, and it felt like it would take all of that time to recover from this party.

This had been such a terrible idea. How did he think he was ever going to pull this off? He was going to let Hannibal down, and the thought of that made him ache.

Will found himself walking towards the sound, towards Hannibal's room. He took a breath before letting himself in.

It was opulent. It was very Hannibal. Will had peered in from the doorway before, stood there talking more than once, but he'd never been inside. He'd always felt welcome to, the way Hannibal always stood back welcomingly if they were talking on the threshold, as though inviting Will in if he so wished. But this was the first time he'd ever gone in.

Will let out a sigh and walked towards the bed. He had slipped between the soft, cool sheets and started to nod off before the shower shut off, the whiskey stupor taking him.

"Will, let me be whatever you need. Would you like me to hold you? Would you like me to leave you in peace? I can sleep in a spareroom."

"Huh?" Will tried to open his eyes but he was so exhausted it was almost painful to do so.

"You're in my bed, Will. You were dreaming. You were asking for me. What can I do?" Hannibal's voice was barely above a whisper and Will realised that he lay in bed next to him. He was dry, and the bed was warm from prolonged body heat, he must have showered hours ago. Laid down next to him rather than waking him and throwing him out.

"I…" Will tried to stay awake but sleep started to claim him again. "Hold me," His words were slurred. His body surrendered.

He fell back to sleep feeling Hannibal's arms encircle him and pull him close to his chest.

*

Will woke and stretched.

Everything ached and his head thumped.

He was warm. Almost a little too warm. And when he moved he was trapped.

Will grunted as he tried to break free, believing it had to be another dream.

But then there was a muffled noise, a hum, and arms circled around him, just as they had once before.

Will drew in a sharp breath and was suddenly very awake. He tried to move again and his head hurt as he started to pull out of Hannibal's arms. For a moment the arms tightened around him, and then Hannibal clearly woke too, releasing Will and clearing his throat.

"Sorry," Hannibal muttered.

"No, it's okay I… I don't know why I came in here last night." Will admitted, moving to the side of the bed so he could lay back into the pillows but out of Hannibal's grasp.

"You'd had a few drinks and the evening had been overwhelming." Hannibal excused.

"I shouldn't have just made myself at home though, should have asked," Will scalded himself, knowing how Hannibal disliked rudeness.

"Will," Hannibal sighed. "This is your home. And…" He swallowed and didn't try to meet Will's eyes. "You're always welcome in my bed."

Will huffed a laugh at that and shook his head dismissively. "Was Bedelia welcome too?" His tone was light, teasing, but there was a deeper feeling of something Will hated to recognise as jealousy. And yet there it was, ridiculously.

When Hannibal didn't reply immediately, he met Hannibal's eyes and frowned, trying to work out why Hannibal had gone so quiet. Why he looked a little hurt, just for a brief moment before the expression was gone again.

"No," Hannibal said quietly, "I never invited her to share my bed, in any capacity. We were never intimate."

Will heard the rest of the unspoken sentence - not the way they had been.

Will swallowed. Part of him, the reckless part, was so tempted to ask Hannibal if he wanted to add a sexual element to this arrangement they had, but he held back. Held back less by being sensible, and more by the knowledge that it would be too much for him.

How much harder this would all be when it ended if they became so intimate. What they had already was almost too much.

Will lay back and let out a sigh, "I can't…"

"I wasn't asking anything of you, Will. We need never touch each other in any way, but please know that if you need comfort or company, you are always welcome here. Whether you wish to be held or just sleep on the other side of the bed with no contact whatsoever.

Will knew he shouldn't feel an internal struggle over this. It should be a simple matter. Of course he shouldn't have come to Hannibal's room, and likely wouldn't have if he'd been in his right mind. But as it stood there was a clear course of action.

He should leave. He should apologise, get up from the bed and leave the room. Try not to think about the awkwardness he had just invited between them and hope they could fall back into the easy domesticity that they'd developed. Put this behind them.

But he didn't.

He didn't move.

Perhaps bolstered by the fact that Will had stayed there, Hannibal cleared his throat and moved ever so slightly closer, closing a little of the space between them,.

"Perhaps there is something in between that we can find? This isn't real, this thing we're doing, but that isn't to say we can't enjoy some of the things it offers."

When Will drew in a sharp breath, Hannibal cleared his throat again and rejoined quickly, "Not sexually, not anything that would make you uncomfortable. But, Will, there is a reason you came here even if you were exhausted and tipsy when you did so. Perhaps even, subconsciously, one of

the reasons you agreed to do this at all. You crave companionship. I can provide that whilst we are doing this. In some ways I already have been."

Will couldn't deny the truth in any of Hannibal's words. It was almost as though he had plucked those thoughts from his head. Before Will had realised quite how overwhelming it might be, primarily because part of him was too drawn to Hannibal to keep the distance that such a thing required. But Hannibal voicing those thoughts made it so hard to remember those arguments he'd made to himself..

There was a time limit on this, they both knew it. This would be temporary and Will didn't want anything more than that, even if he knew that deep down he was starting to feel something much more than significant then friendship towards Hannibal.

With Hannibal raising this, then it was harder to refuse.

"You mean, um…" Will started to clarify but found he couldn't be the one to voice it and he was sure Hannibal realised that when he picked up the thread.

"If you want to be held, I am here. If you want to, if you would like to sleep in here. With me. Now and then or every night, even if you are on the other side of the bed. That's fine. You're welcome. More than welcome."

Will swallowed and nodded his acknowledgement of the words. Which Hannibal must have read as more because he moved close and wrapped an arm around Will's waist, laying his head next to Will's on the pillow.

Will didn't resist. He didn't have it in him. He melted into it instead as Hannibal continued. "If you come into the kitchen and I am making dinner, I wouldn't be resistant to you sliding your arms around me. I wouldn't be resistant to any casual affection you might like."

There it was. Not just intimacy - affection.

That was different. Not more, not less, but different enough that Will shivered.

He wanted that so badly, had wanted it before Hannibal had even asked for his help.

“You can say no, Will.” Hannibal said quietly, gently rubbing his nose into Will’s hair. And Will knew that despite this, Hannibal would pull back if he said no.

He didn’t say no.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Everything goes off without a hitch as Will and Hannibal get... hitched.

"Good morning," Hannibal purred next to Will's ear and pulled him back against his chest as Will let out a sleepy, contented hum.

How easily they had fallen into this, this non-sexual intimacy between them. Sharing a bed since the night of the engagement party. With no further discussion on it, Hannibal had gone to bed the following evening to find Will following him in silence. He had settled into Hannibal's bed and seemed slightly nervous. Hannibal hadn't wanted to scare him like a spring lamb, and had stayed on, what was now, his side of the bed. But after a few minutes, Will had reached out and spooned up behind Hannibal.

Despite the concern that was clearly sometimes there when Will seemed lost in thought, he also seemed much more content. He relaxed into Hannibal's touch now and was comforted by it.

It quickly became clear to Hannibal that Will was a very tactile person who had rarely had the outlet for that that he needed. In fact, he'd go as far as to say that Will was touch starved, and that perhaps had impacted some of the losses he'd suffered. Over the course of that week after the party, he went from tentative in his affections to fully tactile. Seeking Hannibal out for gentle caresses and embraces.

Will was still very hesitant to show affection beyond that, when called for. When they were out and about it was necessary for them to act the couple, Will still stiffened and struggled with that intimacy. Which Hannibal could understand. He struggled with it too, especially the closer they became. It was hard not to let the line between them blur. It was harder to deny that he wanted more.

He wanted this to be real. An unfair expectation of a man who had made it clear that he didn't wish for more, and that Hannibal well knew himself, struggled with such closeness because of his emotional and mental state over the losses in his life. It would be wholly unprofessional to even let Will suspect his feelings were growing deeper. That his interest, that had always been there,was now deep rooted and undeniable. Though, he had no choice but to deny it.

Will continued to squirm a little, until his ass pressed against Hannibal’s flaccid member. Though it didn’t remain that way for long, his body naturally responded.

Hannibal’s breath caught in his throat and he knew that Will wasn’t fully awake yet, and that he should stop him, but the sensation was so mesmerising. It took everything in Hannibal to start to pull away.

But then, Will grabbed his arm as he tried to slide it from him, pulling Hannibal back to him.

“Hannibal…” Will’s voice was sleep heavy but he was definitely awake now, his breathing heavy and Hannibal had no doubt, his cock hard.

Will turned in his arms and pulled Hannibal down into a kiss.

This apparently surprised them both. Or perhaps it was the way their hard lengths then pushed together, and Will pushed back. Not hard, but suddenly, his eyes wide as he looked up at Hannibal.

“Shit, I’m sorry. I was… I had a dream and…” Will shook his head, his face reddening with embarrassment as he tried to move away.

But Hannibal kept him there, caging Will beneath him.

“Will, it’s fine. There’s no reason to be upset.” Hannibal soothed.

Will made a choked little sound, his face hardened and Hannibal waited for Will to growl something at him. But instead Will let out a long sigh, his features easing slightly.

“I guess, I’m just getting too comfortable with this intimacy.”

Hannibal didn’t accept Will’s attempted deflection.

“Or perhaps you wish for more.” They gazed at each other for a long moment before Hannibal clarified, “Physically I mean. It’s only natural.”

No longer fearing that Will would run off to the bathroom to escape him, as he did on occasion, Hannibal rolled onto his back and they lay side by side. Both looking at the ceiling.

“We get married tomorrow, Will. And then we will be married for a year or two. As long as it takes for there to be no question of doubt with my uncle’s arrangement. It is only natural that you might want to be sexually intimate with someone in that time.” Hannibal broached the subject carefully. Not wanting to spook Will into thinking he was asking for more. But it was hard to clarify without it breaking his own heart a little. He did so nonetheless. “We can come to some sort of arrangement. If there are times you’d like to find a lover…”

Hannibal lost the words and Will’s silence made the air feel oppressive.

“I don’t…” Will started. But he never finished the words. Instead he rose from the bed and went into the bathroom, closing the door soundly between them.

*

Hannibal stood in front of the mirror in the hotel suite he and Will would be sharing later. He was adjusting his tie and wondering whether Will was at that moment doing the same thing back at townhouse. A slight swoop in his stomach at the thought.

He'd almost been tempted to stay, to reassure Will and keep him calm, but it was better this way. If Will did have last minute nerves and not turn up, then Hannibal had to allow that. This might be the arrangement they had made but he had no plans to force Will into something he didn't want.

“Hannibal!” Mischa’s voice filled him with joy and he turned to see her as she beamed at him and then flung herself into his arms.

He hadn't even registered the door opening, but he was glad to see her. His uncle and Mischa had arrived the day before, a few hours before the small rehearsal dinner, and would be leaving the day after the wedding. And so far they hadn't been given the chance to spend time alone together. The way his uncle always orchestrated things.

They embraced tightly for a few minutes and then Hannibal held her away from him, "How are you?" His tone meant that he wanted only the truth.

"Fine, honestly. Uncle Roberto is fine, really. He's sweet and supportive just… doesn't want to lose me. I think it would be different if they had children of their own. If you'd have been younger he'd have treated you the same…"

She trailed off and pressed herself to his chest again, forcing another embrace.

"But I miss you. And I want to come live with you."

He ran his hands comfortingly over her back. She knew nothing of the particulars of the arrangement with his uncle, only that Hannibal hoped that he would allow Mischa to come live with him to attend college.

"Anyway," She breathed out a sigh and pulled back, smiling up at him with watery eyes. "Will seems wonderful. A bit shy," She smiled. Her opinion having been formed over the course of the evening before.

"He's quite wonderful," Hannibal agreed without hesitation, and meant it.

Mischa studied his face for a moment, wearing a wry smile.

"When you told me about getting married I was worried that this was some sort of rebound from Bedelia, but… It's not, is it? I'm not even sure you loved Bedelia how you love Will."

Hannibal's cheeks heated. It certainly wasn't difficult to pretend to be in love with Will. It wasn't the effort it had been with Bedelia. Hannibal wanted to pretend it was because Will was a man, but that was not even half of the truth. Mischa could see that much.

"Anyway," She moved her hands to his tie, smartening it up. "It's nearly time."

That meant Will had arrived. Hannibal's heart hurt with so many emotions he couldn't even begin to name them.

*

Will felt shaky. He had been on autopilot all morning, and now he was at the hotel where they had hired the small function suite.

"Will!" Bev's voice filled him with comfort and she was suddenly in front of him. She looked smart in her feminine-cut tuxedo, ready to be his best gal, as she had always been.

She enveloped him into a hug, pressing her face against his to whisper into his ear, "You doing okay?"

He nodded, and pulled back. "Bit overwhelmed but… happy." The smile he gave her was involuntary, and he really did mean it. His head and heart kept trying to convince him that there

was no reason to be happy, this wasn't real. But he had to ignore those thoughts, for this day at least. To make sure people believed them.

He wanted this, everyone had to believe that.

Bev grinned at him, "You know, I love that pompous oddball just for how happy he makes you."

Will grinned. He was sure Bev had worried about this initially, how fast it had all been, but apparently he had been more convincing than he realised. And then Hannibal had sealed the deal. They'd had her over for dinner a few times and she had been immediately amused by and fond of Hannibal.

"Okay, time to go get your husband." Bev took his arm and lead him towards the small room in which they would be having the intimate ceremony. Only the closest friends and family, before the rest of Hannibal's social circle filled the function room for the celebrations after the ceremony.

"I'm ready." Will told her, a slight shiver of fear running down his spine at the realisation that he absolutely meant those words.

*

The room had been laid out in such a way that meant that Will and Hannibal would both enter from opposite doors and meet at the officiant in the centre of the room. It was a small enough room for the distance to be just long enough for their eyes to meet, to take each other in, before they were standing ready to recite their vows.

Will released a shuddering breath.

It was too late to turn back now, and he didn't want to. He didn't want to back out of his arrangement with Hannibal. The implicit promise to help him. It was only for a couple of years, and that would fly by.

Will looked at Hannibal as the officiant began to address the small gathering.

He looked amazing.

It wasn't as though Will hadn't seen him all dressed up before, and if anything his black wedding suit wasn't as garish as his usual fare. But it wasn't just the clothes. There was a soft expression on his face that Will had seen a few times before. Mostly when they had held each other, an unguarded look of affection. One that Will had convinced himself was just that of a fond friend. A sign of his appreciation for what Will was doing. But now Hannibal wore that expression beyond the four walls of their now shared home, and Will was struck dumb by it.

"Will?" The officiant caught his attention and there was a soft, adoring chuckle from their audience

"Sorry?" Will realised he'd missed something, and there was another amused jingle of laughter,

Hannibal moved so that they were no longer near flanking the officiant, but instead stood side by side in front of them. Hannibal slipped his hand into Will's and Will accepted the contact.

"We're going to get started," The officiant said, an amused smile that spoke of how sweet she found them.

Will let out another breath, taking strength from his contact with Hannibal and realising that he'd just made a memory for everyone. Everyone would remember the wedding where Will had been so lost in his soft gaze of affection towards his husband that he hadn't even heard the officiant addressing him.

A charming moment they could remember in their dotage.

Will swallowed, nerves jangling as the ceremony began.

*

Will looked at himself in the mirror of the hotel suite.

The honeymoon suite.

He took in a deep, shuddering breath.

They were married.

It had actually been pretty painless. It had actually been a little too easy. Thankfully there had been less people than the engagement party, and no one minded when the happy couple excused themselves early.

Will sighed. Despite the fact that he and Hannibal had been sharing a bed for weeks, having to share the honeymoon suite together made him nervous. It made him feel like a liar.

Which of course he was. They both were. When they had said those vows. They had both lied.

The thought cut through Will like a stabbing pain and he didn't want to unpack the reasons behind that.

Will pulled at his tie, watching it come loose. Looking over every single detail of the suit he had been married in. It all felt so surreal.

"Will?"

Will took in a sharp breath and stiffened, feeling like he had been walked in on during a private moment.

Hannibal seemed to sense that as he asked softly, "Would you like to be alone?"

Will swallowed and then shook his head.

"No, Hannibal, it's fine. This is your room."

"Our room." Hannibal corrected, his tone almost sounding like an apology. "You're finding this difficult, Will. How can I help you? Would you like me to leave? Or we could both leave and go home?"

Home.

He suddenly imagined Hannibal in the little house in Wolf Trap and his lips tweaked into a smile at the absurdity.

Will shook his head, “No, it’s fine. This is all just very… real now.”

Will turned and looked at Hannibal. His husband.

“I know you must be feeling trapped,” Hannibal started and Will tried to wave him off but he persisted. “If there is anything I can provide for you, you must tell me Will.”

Will gave a half smile and nodded, able to see quite how hard this was on Hannibal too. How guilty the man felt for asking Will to do this.

“It’s not forever,” Will offered by way of consolation, but found the words made his throat ache. Hannibal’s expression faltered into something pained for just a moment before returning to an unreadable mask.

“Will, I think… after yesterday. We should talk about…”

“Will frowned and Hannibal drew a breath.

"Will, I can't ask of you what I asked of Bedelia. We know how well that turned out. It was unfair of me to restrict her life, and yours. But equally, there must be some caution." Hannibal considered for a moment, "I'm talking about intercourse. If you feel the need, the desire, then I will not stand in your way of fulfilling that in any way you see fit, but you must be discrete. Perhaps a weekend away to another city. Somewhere that-"

"Hannibal," Will hadn't meant to interrupt, but found himself jumping in, not wanting to hear any more options his husband wanted to present regarding him sleeping with other people. "I don't want that."

Hannibal nodded thoughtfully, "Bedelia felt that in the beginning also. I just need you to know the options are there if-"

"Hannibal," Will growled his name as a warning, wanting him to stop. "I don't… If I wanted to…"

Will clenched his jaw. How could this be so fake and yet at the same time feel so real?

Hannibal’s words hurt and they shouldn’t. They were practical and considerate. And yet he didn’t want to hear them, not from Hannibal.

"I'm sorry, Will. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. What is it you'd like, now or in the future?"

You

Will’s heart skipped a beat so fast that it made his breath catch in his throat and he coughed for a moment. The truth of that thought was so overwhelming that Will wanted to laugh and cry all at once.

He wanted his husband.

But he couldn’t have him. Not his heart. And anything else wasn’t forever.

He stopped his mouth from answering as quickly as his brain had. Taking a moment to compose himself instead. He wanted to stop himself saying it, but the words were there anyway.

"I wondered… If you wanted. I thought that perhaps the easiest option, if you're interested, would be something with no strings between us?"

"Us?" Hannibal blinked and for a moment Will was terrified that he was about to ruin everything. But then Hannibal let out a shuddering breath and was clearly waiting for Will to continue.

"We're in this together. It would make sense to do this together. If we wanted to." Will tried to sound as practical as Hannibal had when suggesting he should find other lovers.

Hannibal cleared his throat and there was the hint of a blush on his cheeks when he finally replied, "That would seem like a logical answer."

“No strings,” Will reiterated, wanting Hannibal to be entirely comfortable. “Just an extension of what we already have. Of that intimacy into something more, if we’re both in the mood for it.”

Hannibal nodded. “That seems a sensible course.” He cleared his throat and Will realised quite how heavily Hannibal was breathing. “Perhaps it would be wise to try now? To ensure that it is something we’re both agreeable to.”

“You mean to consummate our marriage?” Will asked, his own breaths becoming laboured and his cock swelling at the thought.

“If you would like.” Hannibal offered, stepping close enough so that Will only needed to take one step forward himself.

As they leaned in and kissed, Will tried to ignore how absolutely none of this felt fake anymore.

*

"Will," Hannibal breathed his husband's name, ending in a moan.

The lights were dim, the blankets of the palatial bed had almost formed a nest around them, over the course of the hour or so they had spent exploring each other.

It wasn't like before. This felt like making love.

This *was* making love.

Hannibal moaned as Will gently pressed into him from where he was settled between his legs. Will groaned then too, as they clung to each other.

When had they become so sweaty? He wasn't sure, but his hands slid over Will's arms, clinging to his biceps as Will pressed their damp foreheads together and began to slowly move.

"Hannibal…" Will groaned.

And there was love there, Hannibal was sure. Whether in his mind or in reality, he couldn't be sure. But in that moment he chose to believe what he had been denying himself.

They moved together, grunts and groans between them as Will gently thrust into him. Savouring the moment,

Savouring their wedding night.

Tears pricked the corners of Hannibal's eyes as they made love.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Are these honeymooners falling in love?

Huge thanks to @dragonessenoire for fanart in this chapter! You can share it on twitter - HERE

Somewhere, deep in the back of Will's mind, was a niggling part of him that kept repeating *this isn't real, this isn't real.*

Will thought it would increase as the days went on, but three days into their honeymoon and he could barely hear it anymore.

It was so easy in this place away from home, and away from their real lives to make believe. Of course, it was helped by the easy and comfortable way they were with each other now that they'd allowed themselves to be. The intimate touches during the day and the shared orgasms during the night. It was their own corner of domestic bliss set against the gorgeous backdrop of the remote French vineyard Hannibal had brought them to.

Will took in a breath, the air rich with the crisp scent of turned earth and grapes. It was fresh and clean, miles from anywhere. It was perfect, and Hannibal had known it would be. Will's heart swelled at that thought and he set down his book onto the edge of the rather exquisitely carved sunlounger, and looked over at Hannibal doing gentle laps in the pool.

When Hannibal turned and pushed back towards the end of the pool where Will sat, he realised he was being watched and stopped. He bobbed in the water and used both hands to push his hair back as he looked up and smiled at Will.

"Everything alright?" Hannibal's wry grin made clear that he'd clocked exactly what Will was doing. That he had been admiring his husband's form in the water.

"Oh yeah, fine." Will put on an obvious act of being blasé. "Just thinking about whether to join you or not. Not sure I feel like getting wet."

"Hmm," Hannibal let out an amused hum and then swam towards the edge of the pool and pulled himself up and out.

The sight made Will's breath catch.

Hannibal was deceptively athletic. Under the stuffy clothes and pompous attitude was a man that stayed in shape and had the body to prove it.

Hannibal dripped as he strode over, not stopping to grab his towel or even remotely shake himself off. Instead he continued, soaked, until he reached Will's lounger and lowered himself bodily over Will.

Will let out a cry and made a show of trying to push him off as he transferred the water to Will's light cotton clothes and quickly through to his skin.

"Care to join me now?" Hannibal asked.

"You're a monster." Will chuckled, grabbing his book, now also slightly damp, and setting it on the floor next to the lounger. He opened his arms and spread his legs enough for Hannibal to sink completely against him.

Their mouths met for a slow and sensual kiss.

He loved this softer side to Hannibal, this romantic side that he'd allowed Hannibal to show him. That brought out something similar in himself.

This really was way too easy. And Will had absolutely no desire to fight it, it was their honeymoon after all.

*

Hannibal watched Will as he slept.

His hair went every which way thanks to a combination of the pool water and the evening of love making. He wore a dreamy smile and was the picture of relaxation.

He was the Will Graham that Hannibal always wanted him to be. Relaxed, happy.

Hannibal found himself desperately wanting to provide that happiness. But time was drawing to a close on the honeymoon. Only a few days of this break from reality remained. And whilst he wanted - hoped - it would continue when they returned to their real lives, he had to allow it might not.

He had to allow that this was a lot for Will, perhaps too much. And once reality descended Will might retreat once more. And Hannibal would accommodate that. He would have to, for as long as he and Will remained together, he was committed to ensuring that Will be comfortable at the very least.

Hannibal wasn't a fool. The few stressful days around the wedding might have accounted for them deciding to be casually intimate, and then casually sexual. But he had no right to expect that would continue once they were back in the cold light of day. He'd half expected that it wouldn't even continue on the honeymoon.

But here they were in their own little world. In a bubble together, apart from everyone and everything else. Untouchable by reality.

"You're being creepy again." Will's words were muffled against the pillow.

Hannibal huffed his amusement and Will opened one eye very briefly, as though confirming what he was sure was true - Hannibal was watching him sleep. Again.

"I like to see you at peace," Hannibal replied truthfully and then snuggled down into the bed.

He moved his arm so that it was just above Will's head, moving the other down to Will's hip so that they were laying facing each other.

“I like peace.” Will replied, still half asleep. But he moved forward nonetheless, taking Hannibal’s arm as his pillow and moving to snuggle against Hannibal’s chest.

Will in his arms felt so unbearably good.

Hannibal was just allowing himself to drift off when Will snuggled even closer, which he hadn’t realised was even possible until it happened. Until he felt Will’s hardness against his hip, Will’s lips against his own.

There was no need for words, Hannibal simply opened to him, the kiss deepening even in it’s slow exploration.

It had been this way at the vineyard. Everything was slow and exploratory. Not hurried and impatient. It was like they had all the time in the world for this and Hannibal didn’t want to lose that fantasy.

When his hand stroked over Will’s hip, Will grabbed it and pulled it around so that it rested on Will’s naked rump.

Will pulled back, breathless, “Will you… I want you inside me…”

There was a note of caution that Hannibal understood. They hadn’t done that together before.

“Are you sure, Will?”

Will moaned and buried his face against Hannibal’s chest as he moved Hannibal’s hand again. He hitched his leg up over Hannibal’s hip and then guided Hannibal’s fingers to brush over his hole.

“Please…” Will replied breathlessly, “I want…”

Will’s words choked off a little and Hannibal wasn’t ignorant to this meaning something to Will. At the least that they had reached that level of trust and comfort.

“Hannibal…” Will moaned against Hannibal’s chest, finally pushing him to action. He reached over to the bottle of lube that had been on the bedside dresser for the entirety of their stay so far, making quick work of slicking his fingers.

Both of their breaths caught as he pressed two slick fingers to Will’s hole and began to circle them gently.

“Oh god…” Will clutched hold of Hannibal and his hardness twitched against Hannibal’s hip. “Inside, please.” Will breathed the words. Not begging, not a command. Something in between that was all that Hannibal needed.

He took a breath, breathing in Will's sweat, nuzzling into his neck as he pressed a finger into him.

Will moaned and arched, Hannibal's finger slipping deeper. Hannibal couldn't help but moan in response, feeling how Will's body gripped his finger.

Hannibal pulled his hand away and applied more lube, coating two fingers before pressing them both slowly into Will. He pushed the lube in and out, slicking Will ready for him and enjoying the way Will relaxed into it. The way he started to writhe.

Hannibal's heart was thundering in his chest as he pulled back again, breathing hard as he reached for the box of condoms. It felt like it took a small age to sheath himself and apply more lube, all the while Will whimpered and writhed.

"How, Will?" Hannibal asked gently, placing his hand on Will's hip but not forcing him to roll one way or the other.

With a shudder, Will rolled onto his back and reached for Hannibal, his hand slipping behind Hannibal's neck and drawing him into a kiss.

It was perfect. Soft but passionate.

They were breathing roughly against each other and continuing to kiss as Hannibal moved himself between Will's legs as he opened to him.

"Will…" Hannibal breathed his name against his lips and then pressed their foreheads together.

“Hannibal,” Will replied with such adoration, that Hannibal wanted to melt. Wanted to believe in all of this.

He took himself in hand and lined himself up, moving gently forward and pressing into Will as they both moaned.

“Yes,” Will’s word came out very close to a sob, though Hannibal wasn’t sure if he imagined that.

And then he could think of nothing as Will first wrapped his arms around him, and then as Hannibal pushed deeper, his legs too.

Will clung to him desperately and Hannibal clung back, rocking into Will and savouring every moment, every sensation.

It was gentle, it was slow. More deep, languid kisses as Hannibal held his weight and worked them both towards climax. It was clear neither of them wanted this to be over soon, they wanted to enjoy what little time they had left before reality had to be addressed.

It wasn’t until Will started to clench around him that Hannibal realised how close he was himself. He picked up the pace only slightly, enough to realise he was pleasuring Will outside and in - stoking against his prostate whilst giving the friction he needed to his cock.

Even so, Hannibal wanted to ensure Will’s pleasure. He shifted enough to hold his weight on one side and slid a hand between them. It took only a few strokes before Will cried out and came.

He constricted around Hannibal, already so close to his own climax, that it followed immediately. He spilled hard and hot inside Will, filling the condom with the evidence of what this meant to him.

Something he couldn’t admit to, for fear of the position that would put Will in.

They held each other as they levelled their breathing, sweating and panting and nuzzling. Ignoring everything else for another night.

*

Will winced when the plane touched down. He had no issues with flying, but it felt like the very literal jolt back to reality. He closed his eyes and sighed.

"Are you alright, Will?" Hannibal murmured the words quietly against Will's ear and placed a hand over his on the armrest. He laced their fingers together and Will looked over at him to see the concern on his face.

This was it. They both knew it. They could continue acting as they had on the honeymoon, as a married couple. Or, Will could pull his hand away and they would be no more than the fake lovers they were.

Though that felt like a lie now.

Will had been so concerned before about the lie of this, and he knew those thoughts had eaten at Hannibal too. He hadn't thought about if the fake part started to feel like the real lie. Which was undeniable now.

Or at least, on the honeymoon. Perhaps once back to their real lives they wouldn't even feel this way. It might have just been the situation.

Will considered that and found it impossible to pull his hand from Hannibal's. He took a deep breath and leaned in close to Hannibal's ear when he replied, "Let's just see how it goes."

Will felt as much as heard the shuddering breath of relief that Hannibal released. It resonated deep within him too.

*

Will slept most of the cab ride back from the airport, his head falling against Hannibal's shoulder. By the time they arrived at the house, Will was snuggled neatly beside him and he was loath to lose the moment though he knew he had to. He just hoped that this wasn't the end, it felt like every step closer to reality would be the end of seeing *how it goes.*

"We're home, Will." He spoke gently and watched Will slowly rouse as they pulled onto the driveway.

Will snuffled then woke enough to stretch and move away whilst Hannibal paid the driver.

"I'll get the bags." He told Will, to which Will nodded silently and got out of the car. Hannibal watched him go up and open the front door, let himself in and disappear inside.

Hannibal's heart sank, unable to feel anything but the finality in the way Will had said nothing, the way he had gone inside without even a backward glance.

The feeling, the dreadful ache, deepened as he found the house quiet, as though it was completely empty. As though Will had vanished as soon as he entered or never been there at all.

He left the bags at the door and locked up, forgoing the desire to make himself a drink, and instead made his way up the stairs.

He walked past the door to his own room, intent on taking a look into Will's room, assuming he was there and wanting his space. Even so he wanted to check, needed to check in the silent house.

But then there was a sound from his room, the toilet flush from his ensuite and then movement. Hannibal opened his own bedroom door to find Will, stripped completely bare, climbing into the bed. His breath caught in his throat.

"I don't have the energy for a shower," Will murmured as though already half asleep, or maybe he never really woke up.

"Would you like a drink, Will? Something to eat?" Hannibal asked, trying to keep the emotion from his voice.

Will made a negative noise in the back of his throat and a moment later was gently snoring.

Hannibal swallowed and left the room. He went to the kitchen and made himself a hot drink.

And then stood there looking into the cup.

He needed Will. He *needed* him. His husband.

The thought that they might go back to something less than they'd had in France was painful. He wanted to wake Will and tell him, explain that he wanted them to really be together.

He wanted to date his husband.

The thought was laughable. But the reality was cold.

He couldn't tell Will.

Hannibal took a breath before leaving the now luke warm drink on the side and heading up to bed.

He followed Will's example, stripping down to his underwear before hesitating and then removing them too and getting under the covers.

His movement roused Will slightly, and his husband sleepily wriggled around until he found Hannibal's arms and settled against Hannibal's chest. Very quickly he was breathing deeply again, pulled down into a deep slumber.

*

Will woke snuggled so tightly against Hannibal that he wasn't quite sure how it had actually been comfortable.

But he was. So damn comfortable.

All the more so when Hannibal roused, humming contentedly and nuzzling at Will's ear.

"Morning," Hannibal's voice was rich and deep with sleep.

"Hey," Will murmured back, letting himself be nuzzled, not pulling away. Thinking that maybe they could have this.

Will's breaths came quicker and he hesitated for only a moment before stroking a hand down Hannibal's chest. Lower and lower, letting out a little groan as he discovered Hannibal to be as naked as he apparently was.

He'd been so jetlagged the evening before that the memory of stripping down and getting into the bed had felt like a dream.

"Will," Hannibal panted his name as Will cupped his hardening length. "Should we t-"

Will cut him off with a kiss. Not wanting to discuss the situation, though he knew they probably should. Saying they should just see how it goes wasn't nearly substantial enough, he knew. At the least they should probably have a discussion about what their post honeymoon boundaries would be. If any at all...

A few minutes of deep, languid kisses later, Will pulled back and shook his head.

"No talking, not now. Later." Will trembled as he spoke, starting to rut against Hannibal. He wanted to enjoy this and not question it, and hoped that Hannibal didn't want to either.

He gave him enough time to reply, which he didn't, and then resumed kissing.

He wanted this so much, more than he knew he should. He knew the heartbreak this was going to cause him in the long run, but at least had the consolation that he knew the end was coming. It wasn't going to be something that was sprung on him out of his control like when he'd lost people in the past.

Will felt Hannibal nodding as they continued to kiss and move their bodies together, increasing the friction between them until they had to break the kiss to draw in deep breaths.

Their eyes locked as they continued to move, and Will wanted to believe the emotions he could see in Hannibal's unguarded expression whilst they frot towards their combined pleasure.

The doorbell rang.

It wasn't until the knock, much more insistent, that they stopped. Foreheads resting together as they breathed deeply.

Will let out a low chuckle, "Igno-"

There was another insistent rap, that made Will groan and Hannibal huff.

"I'll see to this." Hannibal growled, slipping from the bed and finding his robe. Will did the same at a slower pace, following behind so that he was half way down the stairs when Hannibal opened the front door.

"Sorry, I know you only got back last night but… is it okay if I come in?"

Will and Hannibal were both silent for a moment, before Hannibal seemed to snap back to reality and take the bag from the young lady's hand.

An overnight bag.

It looked like Mischa Lecter was moving in.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Living a lie becomes very complicated.

“Good morning,” Hannibal murmured the words as Will wandered into the kitchen in just his boxers, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Still more than a little jetlagged.

“Morning,” Will rumbled back, tasting the fresh mint of his toothpaste whilst longing for the coffee he could smell brewing. As he continued towards his husband, Hannibal poured a cup of the coffee from his ridiculous machine and handed it out to him.

Will took it with a smile, stepping in to kiss Hannibal’s cheek before turning to the breakfast bar and nearly dropping the cup on the floor.

“Hi.” Mischa Lecter gave him a sheepish wave and the entirety of the night before raced to the fore of his mind.

“Hi,” Will replied, stilling as Hannibal slid a hand around his waist. What had moments earlier been casual and automatic, now felt strained and forced. Without an audience Will felt at ease to enjoy the lie of domestic bliss. But with an audience there was the pressure to maintain it in a way that made him very conscious of the lie. And of being a liar.

“Thank you for being so kind, I am really grateful. I know you both would prefer time together.” Mischa’s broken English was tinged with a French accent rather than Hannibal’s Lithuanian, but the family resemblance was still there.

“No, it’s fine. Of course you’re always welcome here.” Will said, meaning the words even if they made his heart sink a little.

“Just for two weeks.” Hannibal chimed in, pressing a kiss to Will’s cheek. “Our uncle said she could remain to have a look at the schools she will be applying to.”

“Yeah, makes sense.” Will smiled and nodded, even if it did put a small lump in his throat, “It’s a good idea.”

Mischa smiled brightly at him and Will felt like shit for not feeling as welcoming as he should be. At least for right now he was sure he could play it off as having just been thrown by her impulsive decision to come stay with them rather than remain at the hotel where she had been staying with her aunt and uncle until they had left.

He understood of course, that she wanted to spend time with Hannibal now she had the chance. And apparently she had tried to call first, several times, but they had slept on through.

“I have already made a few calls this morning to move some of my appointments around so that I can drive Mischa to collect the rest of her bags from the hotel.” Hannibal said, and Will could hear

the smile in his voice without looking around.

Mischa popped her last bite of toast into her mouth and then hopped down from where she sat and took her plate to the dishwasher. “I’m going to go have a shower.” She told them before stopping at the door, “Thank you again.”

Once she was out of the room, Will sank against Hannibal, melting into his frame.

“Will? Is everything okay? If you’re still jet lagged you should go back to bed.”

Will took in a breath and sighed it back out, feeling foolish and selfish. “I guess I got used to it just being the two of us.”

“And now we’re back to reality with a bump,” Hannibal murmured, pulling Will to him.

Will turned his face into Hannibal’s chest and sighed again. “I’m being an idiot.”

“Is it Mischa being here?” Hannibal asked gently.

“Ugh, yes. No. It’s not her. I like her, a lot. Of course I do. It’s just… having an audience at home.”

“Oh, yes of course.” Hannibal stiffened as he replied. And it was clear to Will that it was all just dawning on Hannibal. And that made him feel even worse.

Now Hannibal was realising that there was a very clear line for Will. There was this private intimacy that they had agreed to separately from the actual marriage arrangement, for which their public intimacy was required.

Hannibal started to part them, but Will clung for just a moment longer.

“I don’t want you to feel like you are under a microscope, Will.”

Will was about to protest, but he couldn’t, that was exactly how it felt.

*

Hannibal could feel the effort Will was making.

It was clear he liked Mischa a great deal, in fact they had some charming conversations. But to Hannibal it was also clear that having someone else there all the time was causing him strain.

Will smiled brightly when Mischa teased Hannibal, something only she could get away with. He looked through the school brochures with her and shared her excitement. They clearly got along very well. But there was something beneath that which caused Hannibal concern.

Whilst Will was all smiles, very genuine smiles, with Mischa, he grew otherwise more distant. He only interacted in a romantic way with Hannibal when Mischa was present, and even then kept it very lowkey. Enough to keep up the pretence that they had agreed to, whilst backing away from the intimacy they had been sharing.

Mischa didn’t seem to sense that there was anything untoward about the situation. And she liked Will a great deal, seeking him out to ask him questions and get to know him better. Part of Hannibal wanted to encourage that, but part knew that it might be too much for Will to press more on him.

The truth was, deep down Hannibal longed for this to be real.

He longed to see them truly talking with each other, and connecting without Will doing it to play a part. The fact that they genuinely did seem to like each other just made it feel all the worse, he couldn't even imagine how it made Will feel. With the best of intentions, they were still lying to his sister.

By the end of the first week, Will was very distant, edging further from Hannibal in their bed every night. Hannibal was sure that had there not been the need for pretence, he would have moved entirely back into his own room.

And that was the issue, Hannibal understood. With someone else there it always had to be a show. Will could only handle so much untruth, could only be so complicit. So whilst Hannibal spent every night wanting to take Will into his arms and comfort him, it was impossible for him to do so. Knowing that Will wouldn't welcome being comforted over duplicity.

Hannibal's heart ached at what he was asking Will to do, and all the more so that Will really was doing it.

Will spent longer and longer at work, working late and then claiming it was to give Hannibal and Mischa more time together as he'd only be sat around grading papers anyway. Hannibal didn't want to make a fuss and make Mischa worry, she was already apologetic enough about coming to stay so soon after the wedding, so he went along with that lie for Will. A small one to help him cope with the larger one they held.

On reflection, Hannibal wondered if this would have been so hard with Bedelia? He didn't think so. They'd had years to make a convincing routine of it, and neither had any investment in it past their arrangement. Or maybe, it would have been as hard for her but Hannibal wouldn't have noticed, the way he noticed with Will. The way it was impossible to miss when someone you cared about was struggling.

The first evening of the second week Will came back very late, after Mischa was in bed. He joined Hannibal in the bedroom, looking exhausted.

"Will, are you-" Hannibal started as Will closed the bedroom door quietly behind him.

"It's getting too confusing. What we're doing. It's like we really are married but fighting or something and-" Will started and then shook his head, standing with his back to Hannibal as though he might head straight back out the door.

"I understand, Will."

"Maybe." Will replied, turning and finally starting towards the bed. He sat down on the edge of it. "Sorry, I know you do." He apologised and Hannibal wanted to reach for him but held back.

"Mischa will be here only another week," Hannibal offered.

"I know. I'm trying." Will said quietly, looking sheepish.

"It wasn't a reprimand, Will. Is there anything I can do to make this easier for you?" Hannibal asked gently.

“It’s just difficult. Behaving as though we’re really married when it was just the two of us was just something for us. It didn’t have to mean anything. With an audience it becomes a lie, or it becomes real. It messes with my head.” The words left Will in a rush before he scrubbed a hand over his face.

Hannibal clenched his jaw, wanting so badly to reply that they could just let it be real.

“I think maybe I should go stay at my place for a few days. It’s closer to work. I can get my head together a bit and then come back before Mischa leaves. Present a united front.” Will didn’t look at him as he laid out plainly something he’d clearly already considered.

“Of course, Will. If that’s what you need.”

At least Will turned and offered a slight smile then. It felt like not all was lost between them.

*

Will’s little house had never felt so quiet or lonely.

He carried on working late, grading papers in his office before going home to the empty house. A place that had been his sanctuary felt even more isolated than it had after Randall had died.

For the second evening in a row, Will took a glass of whiskey to bed with him as company. It had been a long time since he’d done that, he realised.

He missed Hannibal, and knew there was no point trying to deny that. It just highlighted that the way that had been going about all this was a problem. They weren’t dating, neither of them wanted a relationship, did they? They should never have introduced sex to the situation, it was just making their arrangement all the more difficult.

It was all too much and he had no one to confide in. He couldn’t tell Bev how he was feeling. That it was getting very difficult to live with his husband because they’d started to have regular sex and now Will maybe wanted more. Wanted it for real. But there was no way he could have it. He couldn’t trap Hannibal like that, and he knew full well, just as with everything else, *everyone* else, it wouldn’t last forever. This had an expiry date.

Will sighed and set down his glass, the side light was dim, just enough to illuminate his hand as he let it wander under the blankets at the thought of how much he missed Hannibal. At all those times when they’d been in France making believe that this was something they could really have.

He was already a little hard, just letting the memories come back. All the intimacy they had shared and the pleasure they’d brought each other. The pleasure in the lie too. The pleasure in allowing himself to make believe they really were together, happy. Loved. At peace.

Will let out a shaky breath and took hold of his cock, starting to slowly stroke it as he thought about his husband.

*

“Will?” Hannibal knocked on the door and then let himself in. He hadn’t expected it to be unlocked but perhaps Will had forgotten to lock it before going to bed.

At least Hannibal assumed he was in bed. It was close to midnight and the house was dark, quiet. Will had started messaging him three hours earlier, apparently whilst getting drunk. The content of the messages was a little difficult to decipher the longer time went on, but appeared to be along the lines of self recrimination and anxiety.

When Will hadn't replied to Hannibal's last message, or his subsequent calls, Hannibal had left a note for Mischa to say he missed Will and was going to spend the night with him, and then let himself out.

He tread quietly up the stairs to Will's room.

Once he pushed the door slowly open, there was finally light. A small side lamp that barely illuminated the side of the bed, but it was enough to show where Will slept. He looked as though he'd simply flopped down on the bed, still fully clothed, an open bottle of whiskey on the bedside table and an empty glass next to him on the bed. From the smell, Hannibal wasn't sure if the glass had been empty when Will set it down.

Hannibal's heart ached.

"What am I doing to you, Will?" He asked quietly.

There was no response, no sign Will was alert, just his steady, heavy breathing.

Hannibal frowned and backed out of the room, opening a couple of doors before he found a spare room that was made up, though there were a few boxes stored in the corner.

Hannibal pulled off the throw blanket that covered the bed, along with a little dust. Then he pulled back the sheets, releasing the scent of clean linens. Setting the pillows and sheets so that it would be easy to get into, Hannibal went back to Will's room.

It took a few minutes to roll Will around, get him stripped out of his dirty clothes and down to his boxers, before carrying him through to the other room.

Will made a pleasant murmuring sound as Hannibal set him down on the clean sheets, pulling them up over him so that he was completely snug.

Hannibal watched Will for a minute, the steady rise and fall as he breathed. The way his hair fell on the pillow, needing a cut. He'd offered to do it for him whilst they had been away, which had led Will to many jokes about barbers and surgeons having the same tools, and speculating as to whether he'd end up in a pie.

The thought brought a smile to Hannibal's face and he stepped out of the room before the temptation to hold Will became too much.

He went back to Will's room and stripped the sheets, which had indeed experienced a spillage. He'd leave it to air for the night and find proper cleaning supplies in the morning. In the meantime he took the dirty sheets and Will's clothes down to the laundry and popped them in the basket there before pouring a cold glass of water.

It was gone one when Hannibal returned to Will and set the glass down onto the bedside dresser. He had done so gently, but there had still been enough of a noise for Will to look up. He must have already stirred, though he didn't seem entirely awake.

“Hannibal?”

“Shh, go back to sleep, Will.” Hannibal encouraged, stepping closer. He hesitated for a moment before slipping his fingers into Will’s curls, petting him softly. “Go to sleep.”

Hannibal took a breath and started to pull away whilst he still had the resolve.

“No,” Will’s word was broken by sleep and alcohol, his hand a little shaky as he reached out. “Stay.”

Hannibal paused, knowing this was likely the alcohol talking and that he should leave all the same. But his resolve was always thin when it came to his husband. So as Will settled and began to softly snore, Hannibal stripped down to his own underwear and slid into bed behind him.

*

“Hannibal?”

Will trembled realising his husband was next to him in the bed. Not his bed, he realised, nor Hannibal’s. It had taken him a moment to realise it was the bed in his spare room, and another to remember that he had fallen blind drunk into bed with a bottle of whiskey almost as soon as he’d gotten in from work.

He could vaguely remember messaging Hannibal and sorely wanted to locate his phone so he could see exactly what had been said to bring Hannibal here.

Will turned, Hannibal was still sleeping but he stirred and turned too so that he rolled from his back and onto his side, away from Will. Will let out a shaky breath, his skin buzzing at the closeness. The temptation.

One that was too much, which was part of the reason he’d left in the first place. It had been so hard to stay with Hannibal and not indulge their lie when it didn’t always feel like much of a lie at all.

Will scooched closer and wrapped an arm around Hannibal, spooning up behind him. He placed his face at Hannibal’s neck and breathed in the scent of him. One he’d missed, one that made him snuggle closer.

Within a few minutes Hannibal’s breathing had started to level out and he was clearly starting to rouse from his sleep. Will knew he should pull back, that this wasn’t helping anyone, but he couldn’t. He needed it. Needed Hannibal.

“Will?” Hannibal’s voice was heavy with sleep as he turned to look at Will over his shoulder, blinking the sleep from his eyes.

“Hannibal, I-” Will started to mutter, started to very slowly pull away, but Hannibal’s hand reached back and grabbed his arm, holding him there.

“I missed you,” Hannibal said quietly.

Will let out a groan, all willpower to resist was seeping from him. “I had to leave. But I’ll come back, I promise.”

“I know,” Hannibal reassured gently. “Mischa leaves soon, will you come back for her last evening? I’d like to cook us all dinner.”

“Of course,” Will had already agreed to this and felt bad that Hannibal had to ask for the reassurance. “I’m sorry I got drunk and… I don’t know, made you come look after me.”

“You didn’t make me, Will. I wanted to.”

Will let out a shuddering breath and rested his forehead against Hannibal’s shoulder.

“This is a mess.”

“Not one that we can’t get through. Just tell me what you need.” Hannibal coaxed.

Will sighed, “Right now? I need you. Later? I don’t know. Tomorrow?”

Hannibal nodded. “You can have me, Will. Right now. And the rest we can deal with as it comes.”

Will nodded, his breathing becoming ragged as Hannibal pushed back against him, pressing himself to Will’s awakening cock. A flash of hurt went through Will at Hannibal’s meaning. That the only need between them was sexual, nothing more. He hadn’t meant to verbalise his need, and it didn’t matter that he had, because Hannibal thought it was only sexual.

Will wanted to pull away, but then Hannibal ground his hips back against him and Will was lost to the fantasy he wanted.

“Oh fuck,” Will muttered against Hannibal’s skin, rutting gently against his ass. His mind was still hazy and he wondered if he were actually dreaming this. He’d certainly had too much to drink the night before to fight it.

Will wrapped his arms tighter around Hannibal as they continued to move together. He slipped his hand to the front of Hannibal’s boxers and squeezed the swell there, releasing another moan as he did so. Hannibal grunted in response, which urged Will to move his hand beneath the fabric and take hold of Hannibal’s cock, stroking it in time with his own thrusts against Hannibal’s ass.

If he wasn’t hungover and had everything to hand, he’d have loved nothing more than to bury himself deep within his husband. But this was good, this was perfect. The intimacy and the pleasure. Everything he wanted, with Hannibal. Only with Hannibal, forsaking all others.

Will choked out a cry as he came in his boxers, the dampness immediately wetting through to Hannibal’s underwear. Hannibal let out a soft rumble and added his own hand to Will’s speeding up the stroke until he too came.

They remained holding each other as they tried to catch their breaths, before wordlessly they both pulled off their soiled underwear and dropped them on the floor. They lay back together then, in each other’s arms.

“You’ll come home?” Hannibal asked.

That repeated need for reassurance made Will’s chest ache as much as what he needed to say next. But he knew it was for the best, the only way they were going to be able to make this work.

“Yes. But… I think I should move back into my own room. I don’t think we should do this anymore.”

Hannibal stiffened slightly but then nodded, “Yes, of course, Will.”

There was a note of disappointment there, maybe even hurt. And Will knew how that felt, because as much as he knew this was the right thing and they had to do this, part of him was sad that Hannibal agreed to it so easily.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

An impromptu family reunion

Hannibal tried for months for it not to be awkward, but there was no getting around the shift in the way they were with each other.

There was no more domesticity, and when they had to show affection outside of the home, it had started to feel forced. It never had before for Hannibal, but knowing that Will really didn't want it, made it difficult for him.

They had separate rooms, separate lives. Little more than housemates. And whilst, really that should have perhaps been the expectation all along, it was so very difficult after their time together in France.

After their honeymoon.

Hannibal sighed and set the coffee going, expecting Will would come down as usual to pour some into a travel mug before leaving for work.

The mail had come early, so Hannibal set that down and picked through it. A couple of bills, but at the bottom an ornate envelope posted from France. His heart sank, knowing this could only be from his uncle.

There was a time, when they'd first started all this, that he might have waited for Will and accepted any comfort his fake husband might give him. But now he had no expectation of that, and no intention of forcing more onto Will than he really should.

He took in a deep breath and let it out slowly as he slid a knife under the envelope and sliced it open.

Inside was an invitation of beautifully monogramed, and clearly custom-made paper. Written in French, it invited Dr Lecter and Mr Graham to a celebration that was being thrown in Mischa's honour. It would take place at the country home of the Lecter's, a little outside of Paris.

He let out a sigh as he read it. Accommodation would be provided at the house for he and Will for a long weekend. A small note had been slipped in from his uncle, intimating that he wished for them to have frank discussion about Mischa's future whilst he was there.

There was no way he could deny going, but surely he couldn't put Will through this? He had barely met his aunt and uncle at the wedding, and Hannibal had been glad of it. He himself had been able to steer clear quite well with the excuse of accepting congratulations from other guests.

"What is it?"

Hannibal looked up to see Will had halted at the kitchen door and was looking at him with concern. His eyes flicked down to the letter and back up again before Hannibal schooled his expression into something less pensive.

“An invitation. My aunt and uncle are hosting a party in Mischa’s honour after she graduates, a send off before she comes here. They have invited us to attend.” Hannibal laid it out plainly before adding, “I can send your regrets of course. They will understand that getting time off from your employment might not be-”

“I should go,” Will countered with a frown.

“You don’t have to, Will. Please don’t feel that-”

Will interrupted again, “Hannibal, what if they suspect something? Or even if they don’t, we don’t want to give them reason to by my not attending. You’d have to spend the entire time explaining to everyone where I am, why I’m not there. Which would be unfair on Mischa too.”

Will continued to stand there, continued to frown. His expression finally started to ease a little as Hannibal let out another sigh.

“I don’t like the thought of us being around my family like that, on their terms.” Hannibal admitted.

Will sighed then, a soft noise before he started across the room. He came to stand next to Hannibal and put a hand on his shoulder.

“I know. It’ll be okay, it’s only a few days. What are the dates? I’ll sort out leave.”

Hannibal pushed the invitation over so that Will could read it for himself, and then, without thinking, slid a hand up over Will’s to take the offered comfort.

Will stilled for a moment and then drew his hand away, not slowly, but not sharp. Enough for Hannibal to realise he had stepped over that line they had put between them and had kept reinforcing.

“I-” He went to apologise, but Will waved him off and picked up the invite.

“I’ll let you know once leave is approved.”

Hannibal nodded as Will turned and walked out the door, not stopping to fill up his travel mug.

*

Will spent the flight to Paris, which felt unreasonably long, trying to make sure he fell asleep against the window and not against Hannibal.

All the while, considering what a horrendous idea this all was.

He knew that it was right for him to go, after all it had been mere months and they didn’t need to raise any suspicions that their marriage was fake, or in trouble. Of course it made sense that he went.

But he didn’t have to like it. His mind reeled through the chances, which were slim to none, that they would be given separate rooms. Or that they wouldn’t have to be living the lie, putting on a

show, for twenty-four hours a day.

Hannibal had tried to insist on booking a nearby hotel, even with his uncle's kind offer of accommodation at the house. An offer that felt more like a command. But Hannibal had held firm, at least until Mischa had caught wind of this and begged for them to stay at the house. She wanted to share that part of her life with them, and she wanted Hannibal and her uncle to try and make up this rift between them. After all, her uncle had agreed to her coming to the US now, and everything should be fine.

Will could understand why Hannibal was unable to deny her request. Despite everything that had happened with her previous visit, he really did like her. And of course, his reaction to her being there was not at all her fault. If anything it was his own, for allowing things to go the way they had. Especially on the Honeymoon.

They should just never have gone in that direction, so if anything Will owed it to her to stay at the house and be familial.

Even so, after the long, awkward flight, where he was sure they probably should have used the time to talk about how things would be at the house. Will had not expected Mischa to be at the airport waiting for them!

As they came through from customs with the small roll on cases they had brought, there she was waiting excitedly in Arrivals.

Hannibal spotted her first and when her name left his lips with such happiness, Will melted a little. He loved how much Hannibal loved Mischa, the lengths he would go to. The man had many good qualities and his love for Mischa was definitely one.

Hannibal let go of his case handle and didn't seem to care that the case then hit the ground with a thud as it overbalanced. He ran to Mischa, who was already running to him, and when they met he lifted her from the ground into a hug as he spun them both.

Will couldn't help but smile at her delighted laughter.

He leaned down to pick up the case handle, ready to wheel both their cases and surprised when Mischa joyously called, "Will!" and then was upon him too. She threw herself at him and he ended up having to let go of both cases to catch her in a hug.

"I'm so glad you could come!" She said happily as he set her back on her feet.

"Of course," he replied. "We wouldn't have missed it."

Hannibal was back with them then and Will couldn't miss the expression on his husband's face. The adoration that shifted between both Mischa and Will. He knew Hannibal was so very grateful for everything Will was doing, it was no wonder that fondness was there.

It didn't do to think about these things too deeply, Will knew. Instead he simply allowed it when Mischa linked arms with them both and the three of them were three-astride, plus their cases, as they went to the taxi rank.

*

“Will Graham!” A booming voice greeted, “So nice to meet you. Mischa has already told us so much,” Roberto said, with a hand out to Will first, who shook it politely.

But Hannibal didn’t miss the tone, nor the look Roberto gave him when he mentioned that it was Mischa who had told them all about Will.

After hand shaking and cheek kissing, Will seemed expectedly out of his depth in such an endearing way. Not because of the arrangement between them, but because he was so terrible with people that it was almost adorable. Not a word Hannibal applied very liberally.

But there was no doubt that his attraction to the ways in which Will was so opposite to himself, were very curious. More than attraction, more than affection really.

It was easy to do his part in this charade and look at Will as a besotted husband would.

Aunt Murasaki was gracious, always so good with people, and insisted they stop standing upon ceremony and “allow the young men to get to their room.”

At which Hannibal was able to interject, “We didn’t sleep much on the flight, perhaps you wouldn’t mind if we rested until dinner?”

This he directed at his aunt, always the more reasonable of the two of them when it came to entertaining and etiquette.

“I insist upon it!” She replied, shooing them towards the rather grand staircase in the atrium of the house. She signalled to one of the few household staff they kept and a young man dashed over and took their bags, starting towards the stairs with the clear expectation they follow.

“Thanks,” Will drawled in a charming accent that earned him smiles from both women. Hannibal gave a curt nod and a smile to the both as he put his hand in the small of Will’s back and guided him up the stairs.

He didn’t miss the wry smile Will shot him, yes this must all be deeply amusing to his husband, who had several times before claimed that real people did not live like this. Or like Hannibal. Perhaps he was right. There was something entirely more authentic about Will Graham, and it was yet another thing that Hannibal found captivating about him.

When they reached the room, Will’s eyes were trained on Hannibal’s. Somewhere between amused and perplexed as the boy placed their luggage on little racks, and drew the curtains for them. For a moment Hannibal wondered if he would turn down the bed, and if he did, quite how much Will would laugh.

Blessedly, the man left then and Will let out an amused sigh.

“Oh wow, I thought for a second I was going to have to tip him. This place is…” He trailed off and shrugged.

Hannibal chuckled, “Yes, I suppose now you will believe that I live quite modestly by comparison.”

Will laughed at that and shook his head, “I absolutely believe that you would have ‘staff’ if you weren’t so fastidious about your kitchen. I’m surprised you even let me touch anything in there.”

The tease made Hannibal's chest swell. Oh, how he wanted this easy banter all of the time.

And that was clearly what Will saw when his face fell and he cleared his throat.

"I'm going to grab a shower and then nap, okay?" Will asked a little sheepishly.

"Of course, Will." Hannibal replied with a soft smile.

*

Will was already asleep when Hannibal returned from their ensuite after his own shower. Even so, Will had made sure to sleep as far over as he could despite the palatial king size they found themselves in.

So it had been a surprise to wake in the middle of the bed with his arm wrapped around Hannibal. He was spooned up tightly behind him and when he realised, he froze. He should move away, but Hannibal was still sleeping, still softly snoring. And so he didn't.

He knew he should. It was terrible that he didn't. But he couldn't help but stay there and relax back into the position. He wanted to nuzzle Hannibal's neck, wanted to bury his face in the crook of it and breathe the man in. But he simply satisfied himself with laying there. Not moving.

Not tightening his hold or loosening it.

Just simply remaining with Hannibal in his arms and an ache in his chest.

He was starting to drift back off a little when a gentle but firm knock at the door woke them both.

"Huh?" Will startled and practically jumped to the other side of the bed, hoping that Hannibal was still too sleepy to realise what he had been doing.

Hannibal for his part, rolled onto his back and blinked his eyes open, taking in the ceiling before turning his head and seeing Will.

There was the slightest glint of surprise at their being together, and then the fog cleared and it was replaced with realisation. He wondered how jetlagged Hannibal was.

That was when the second knock came and the loud 'whisper' of Mischa at the door, "It's forty minutes until dinner, I thought you would like to know."

Hannibal cleared his throat and sat up, swinging his legs around and sitting at the edge of the bed. His broad back to Will, who swallowed at the view of him in nothing but his underwear. So close and yet so far in every possible way.

"Thank you Mischa, we will be down shortly."

"Okay," Came the bright reply followed by footsteps that quickly faded.

"She's a sweet girl," Will forced himself to say something and those were the words that came to mind. He took in a deep breath and then sighed it out before climbing out of the bed.

Hannibal must have misread his unintentional sigh, as he replied, "She is. I just wish this wasn't all so difficult for you."

“Mischa isn’t difficult for me,” Will answered honestly, “And everything else, I guess I’ll just have to deal with it.”

Will instantly remembered how things had been at their engagement party, with Hannibal kissing him to save him from having to socialise. The thought of doing the same at Mischa’s party made his cheeks heat and his heart ache.

They dressed in near silence, the occasional word her and there.

Will asking whether he should wear a shirt and tie, or if just a nice button down would do. Hannibal commented on how well Will’s shirt went with his pants.

It was all so sickeningly polite. Will hated it.

Dinner replaced one awkwardness with another.

Will was seated between Mischa and Hannibal, with Roberto and Murasaki opposite. It felt very much like being a bug under a microscope.

Mischa asked him a lot of questions about how he had been since they last saw each other, and just general chit chat that they had shared before. It was clearly not a forced effort, but a real interest in him, which was flattering.

All the while, their aunt and uncle sat watching and listening intently.

Murasaki wore a pleasant expression that betrayed nothing, though Will didn’t get the sense that she was anything other than amiable towards him. Roberto on the other hand, his expression was hard and flitted enough times between he and Hannibal that Will started to grow concerned that he suspected something.

Hannibal must have had a similar thought because when Will set down his wine glass, Hannibal’s hand settled over his own and he laced their fingers together. Playing his part, Will turned and smiled at Hannibal, lifting their hands to place a kiss on the back of Hannibal’s.

“Still honeymooning, I see.” Murasaki commented, her eyes warm as she smiled at them.

“It’s difficult not to be when one’s husband is so… delightful.” Hannibal responded, making a show of finding a polite word. Both Murasaki and Mischa laughed and Will shook his head and rolled his eyes - not an entirely affected performance. To which Mischa chuckled again, this time at her brother’s expense.

“How was it you met again?” Roberto interjected abruptly.

Hannibal’s response was cool and immediate, “I don’t think it would be proper of me to give you full details, given the circumstances of our meeting. But I will say it was at a coping with loss meeting. When Bedelia asked me for a divorce I had many feelings I needed to deal with.”

“I bet,” Roberto huffed and seemed amused. No one but the man himself seemed to miss the look that Murasaki shot him. He continued on, pouring himself another glass of wine as their plates were being cleared. “It must have been very hard to have to start over.”

The words were pointed and though Will didn’t miss the barb any more than Hannibal did, there was of course nothing either of them could say in that regard.

It was a relief when Hannibal simply replied, “Quite. I had not expected to find love again, and much less in such circumstances. Now I am thankful for all that happened, otherwise I wouldn’t have met Will.”

Will smiled and leaned into Hannibal as he pressed a kiss on Will’s cheek.

Roberto looked like he was about to say something more, but Will cleared his throat, looked at his glass of wine and then said, “You know, the funniest thing about it all, I was there about a dog.”

“A dog?” Mischa exclaimed, curious and cautiously amused.

Will grinned and looked at her, nodding. “Yeah, all seems so foolish now. I had a dog, Randall. Ridiculous creature, all limbs and dog breath. He was sort of a loner, Irish Wolfhounds they can be kinda introverted. So we worked well together. When he died it was a big loss for me. I mean, he was a huge animal.” Will chuckled and everyone joined in politely.

“But yeah, I struggled. I went to group. And I’m… I’m just so grateful for meeting Hannibal. Not only because he helped me see that my inability to deal with losing Randall was because of previous unresolved issues with loss. But also because… Well, we’re married now.” Will grinned and held up their clasped hands to show his ring. “Unexpected. But needless to say… I’m also super grateful to Bedelia.”

Everyone laughed at that, though Roberto's chuckle seemed a little snide. It didn’t matter though, Will was too lost in Hannibal’s adoring gaze to care.

*

Will woke hard.

Not an unusual occurrence, but it had been some time since he had done so whilst snuggled up with Hannibal.

And there was no other word for it. Hannibal lay on his back and Will was cuddled into his side, slotted into the crook of his arm with his head resting on Hannibal’s chest.

Will could only blame it on the wine.

He wished he hadn’t drunk, or wished he hadn’t come here. One or the other. He just wished that he wasn’t snuggled up against Hannibal with his dick pressing hard to Hannibal’s thigh in a way that there was no chance not to notice.

Maybe he just wished this was real. That they could let it be real. That he could acknowledge the depth his feelings had reached since they’d gotten married.

The way his hips wanted to grind forward was almost an overpowering compulsion.

Almost.

He managed to not move a single muscle, to the point where his neck started to ache.

When Will tried to move away he drew his arm back from across Hannibal, catching it in the sheets. He winced and tried to pull back without waking Hannibal, but then his arm moved down and he could only extricate himself from the strangely twisted sheets, by pulling back from there.

Across Hannibal's crotch.

And oh, holy fuck, Hannibal was so hard. It wasn't difficult to imagine that the man was already leaking precome.

That was when it became clear that they were both in the same predicament. Both awake, both hard and both wanting the other not to notice.

"Will, I…" Hannibal started, breathy and unsure.

Will shut his eyes, not wanting to know what words would come next. A love confession or a request for a fuck? Probably neither of those. Either way, Will didn't want to know.

"It's okay," He cut Hannibal off and moved back, the sheets coming with him. He couldn't help his eyes trailing down to Hannibal's tented pyjama pants. "It happens. Y'know? Biology." Will forced a laugh. "I'm sure we can both be adults about it."

Easier said than fucking done as his own cock got all the harder for seeing Hannibal's arousal.

"Of course," Hannibal agreed, his voice strained.

"I'm going to, um. I need the bathroom." Will forced the words and practically scurried to the ensuite. He was panting when he got there, locking the door behind him and resting his head against the door jam.

"Fuck," He muttered quietly. He stood there a few moments longer before he allowed a hand to snake down to his crotch and cup himself.

Fuck he was hard. His mind was reeling through the memories of the times he and Hannibal had been together and that wasn't doing anything to make him soften.

There was only one way this was going to get resolved and he knew it.

Will swallowed and palmed his cock for a moment before pushing his boxers down to his thighs and taking himself in hand. He braced himself against the door, imagining Hannibal doing the same on the other side. Imagining him lying in the bed with his cock in hand and Will's name on his lips.

And then he heard him.

The soft groan was unmistakable, and it was obvious that Hannibal really was touching himself.

"Oh fuck," Will cursed and began to stroke himself harder, faster. He grunted and growled and knew that Hannibal could hear him. There was no way that he couldn't.

And then Hannibal was moaning and the slick sounds of both of them bringing themselves to climax carried through the door.

There was no denying this. They both knew what was happening, they both were partaking in this. But with the door between them they had plausible deniability. When this was done and the door opened, then it never happened. They would never speak of this.

Will groaned and sobbed, pressing his face into the crook of his arm on the door. Fucking into his hand as he remembered fucking into Hannibal. His whole body trembled with the impending

orgasm. And suddenly it was upon him, shaking through him as he shot hot ropes of come all over the bathroom door.

He worked himself through the climax, feeling the wetness of tears on his face as his memory taunted him with something he couldn't have.

Something he wanted so badly. Something he loved so dearly.

Will sucked in a breath at the admission to himself.

He was so painfully in love with Hannibal Lecter and there was nothing he could do about it.

He squeezed his eyes shut as he heard Hannibal's breath stutter through his own climax, feeling more alone than he ever had before.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Uncle Roberto is a catalyst for some much needed change.

Extra warning for some homophobia in this chapter.

They didn't speak about it.

A silent agreement amongst so many others between them. They wouldn't discuss the fact that they pleasured themselves to the sound of each other. The thoughts of each other.

Will tried to not even think about it.

No mean feat when they had to put on their husband act every moment they were out of the bedroom. He wanted to hate the fact that Hannibal made this easier as they walked down to breakfast.

He slipped his arm around Will's waist and leaned in close enough to whisper, "Just a couple more days. Hopefully I'm not too hard to pretend to love." Hannibal ended his tease with a chuckle.

It made Will's stomach swoop and he clenched his jaw. It took physical effort in that moment not to agree out loud. But this wasn't the time or the place. He wasn't sure if and when there would be a right time. Not whilst they were tied into this situation. Not ever.

He just couldn't.

Will felt a sudden chill through him at the thought of being rejected. Of Hannibal realising how he felt and treating him and… Fuck, treating him the way Will had been treating Hannibal for weeks.

Will stopped, forcing Hannibal to do the same. He was a step below Will and looked up at him with a curious smile.

"I'm sorry," Will muttered quietly, holding his gaze.

Hannibal's expression went from curious to quizzical as he tried to understand what Will was talking about.

"I've been… distant. I'm sorry for that." Will took hold of Hannibal's hand and pulled him closer.

Hannibal swallowed and for a moment it was real. Or maybe that was Will's wishful thinking.

"It's alright, Will. I understand this has been difficult."

"It has," Will admitted. "But we're in this together."

“I will be led by you, Will.” Hannibal murmured, seeming to hesitate when Will thought he would step closer. “However you want to do this. For this weekend, or beyond.”

He looked so much like a puppy that Will wanted to sink into it, even if it was just a show and just for now.

“Sorry,” He said again, pulling Hannibal close, “Maybe we can be honeymooners again?”

Hannibal closed the space between them, “Yes, I’d like that.”

Will tried not to read anything into his words beyond how much easier it would be for both of them to go back to that time. Especially for this weekend.

Hannibal kissed him softly, and Will sighed into it.

The chuckle from the bottom of the stairs pulled them apart. Will’s face was hot as he looked down at Mischa who was also blushing.

“Sorry,” She smiled.

Hannibal’s smile was so beautiful as he turned to his sister that Will felt himself fall deeper into the fantasy of this. And he didn’t stop himself. He couldn’t at this point, they had to get through this weekend, so he couldn’t fight it. Selfishly, he did’t want to.

“The apologies are mine, I am too easily distracted by my husband.” Hannibal rumbled the words, and took hold of Will’s hand as he continued down the stairs.

*

Hannibal tried to contain how good it felt to hold Will’s hand as they followed Mischa out to the garden. They had promised to let her show them around the grounds, and he suspected specifically that she wanted to show Will the pond.

They arrived at the little jetty before he realised it, Mischa chattering excitedly with Will as Hannibal just tagged along. He felt the warmth of their connection and enjoyed the familial sense of it all.

It was impossible to ignore the genuine sense of affection he felt when holding Will’s hand. Not just his own, but from Will. In the way the Will laced their fingers together and held tight, squeezing occasionally. Hannibal never wanted to let his hand go. The fact that he wouldn’t have to for at least the next day or so filled him with joy.

“Maybe when you have time off from school, we can all go to my house for the weekend and I can teach you to fish.” Will said to Mischa, genuine affection in his voice.

Hannibal fought not to squeeze Will’s hand with the affection it brought to him too. It would be nice for the two of them to be friends, and hopefully remain so no matter what happened between himself and Will in the future. Will was so big a part of Mischa’s life now without her even realising it, that it would be strange for him not to be in future.

He couldn’t help but think how different things would have been with Bedelia. She would have, of course, been warm and pleasant towards Mischa. But he couldn’t imagine they’d ever have had this sort of quick connection.

“You too,” Will continued, tugging on Hannibal’s hand. “If you want to.”

Hannibal blinked and looked over at him, their eyes meeting and holding. Hannibal smiled and enjoyed the very slight blush on Will’s cheeks.

“I’d like that very much.” Hannibal replied honestly. And perhaps Will could see just how honest he was being because his smile was so full of adoration that Hannibal was sure it couldn’t be false.

Hannibal cleared his throat, trying to ignore his own wishful thinking, but then Will tugged his hand again. And whilst Mischa continued to walk down to the pond’s bank, Will pulled Hannibal close and ran his hand up behind Hannibal’s neck.

Despite the confident motion, Will then seemed shy and unsure. Perhaps worried about being rejected, so Hannibal closed the space and their lips met in a soft, almost chaste kiss.

Will pulled back only enough to mutter against Hannibal’s lips, “I think we’ll be able to fool everyone perfectly well tonight.”

Hannibal’s heart sank at the reminder of this deception, but all the same he nodded and agreed before they started to catch up with Mischa.

*

The foyer of the house had been completely transformed into a reception area, and the unclosed doors led to the downstairs amenities, a small cloakroom and then through to the equally lavish terrace and grounds.

It was exactly as Will had pictured it would be. Give or take.

There was something that screamed European country manor, whilst also being modern and decadent. It was the sort of decadent where it was obvious there was a lot of money being thrown around, but not enough to be garish about it.

It wasn’t the expense that bothered Will. It wasn’t his business what other people spent their money on, even if he might be a bit more frugal with his own. It was the people.

Things had been bad enough at their engagement party. Having to meet colleagues and friends of his then-fiance, who moved in drastically different social circles. He had been polite to the other board members of the Baltimore Philharmonic Orchestra, but it wasn’t like there was much small talk they could make. At least none of them had seemed snobby with him. If anything they had seemed delighted that Hannibal had found himself someone new. Someone everyone had silently agreed was much more suitable than Bedelia.

They had apparently approved of him greatly, though he wasn’t sure the few words spoken between them gave them much insight.

Either way though, the engagement party turned out to have been a cake walk compared to this.

The side eyes from the Parisian elite were not even remotely subtle.

He’d dressed up in a nice suit, one that Hannibal had taken him shopping for though he’d paid for it himself. It was off the rack, but high quality, and luckily fitted to perfection. Will actually didn’t feel remotely underdressed.

Which was damn nice, because he felt lacking in every other way.

His French was good enough that he was able to make small talk if required, one on one. But in a group, it was hard to understand when everyone was talking fast and especially if they were overtalking each other. He could make out enough of it to follow somewhat, but not enough to really contribute.

Will's first thought was that being unable to truly converse was great. He couldn't possibly seem rude if he had no way to contribute. But when he was introduced by aunt Murasaki to the fourth group of people who commented "ah yes, an American," before continuing in French, he was starting to take their snobbery personally.

Every time Will excused himself, Murasaki seemed to find him and take him to another group, just to repeat the same over again. And every time he looked around to find Hannibal for some help, he was with Mischa and some younger people that must be her friends.

He wasn't about to pull Hannibal away from letting his little sister show off her long distant brother to friends she had likely told so much to. It didn't look like he'd be saved by making out in the corner this time.

Will's heart sank at the thought. Not simply because he wanted to have the excuse to make out with Hannibal. But because he just *wanted* to make out with Hannibal.

The walk down to the pond had been amazing. Mischa exuded so much welcoming affection that it was hard not to already feel part of their family. And being with Hannibal in such a relaxed way after agreeing that they would give that a go again, had been wonderful. It had felt so damn real that he'd had to remind himself out loud that it wasn't. He forced himself to mention how well they'd be able to fool everyone in an attempt to ensure Hannibal wasn't uncomfortable.

Well of course, it was easy to fool people into thinking you were in love if you really were. And Will really was. He couldn't deny it to himself any more even if he had to deny it in all other ways.

He pushed the thought away, it wouldn't do any good to dwell on it.

Will looked around to see his chance had finally come, Murasaki's friends had moved away for refills and Murasaki herself was not in sight. So Will broke for the garden, hoping to get some fresh air and perhaps some distance from the throng.

No such luck as the first person he ran into as soon as he walked out onto the terrace, was Roberto Lecter.

"Mr Graham," Roberto greeted him with a smile, but the rest of his expression and his tone were taunting. "Or, is it Mr Lecter-Graham? What is the done thing?"

Will tried to keep the smile plastered on his face, but the words set him on edge. And more than that, Roberto did. He had since they'd arrived, but it definitely seemed that as time went on, he was less shy about revealing his distaste.

Will wasn't sure if it was for himself, for Hannibal, them as a couple, maybe gay people in general? Will usually read people very well, but there was something in the way Roberto was, and especially in the way Murasaki cowed him, that made it difficult.

If he had met the man anywhere else, he'd have straight up just pegged him as a homophobe. But he had been fine up until now, hadn't kicked up a fuss over their engagement or marriage. Hadn't tried to use it to end the contract regarding Mischa's residency. Of course, he'd have to find a bigoted lawyer to fight the contract on the ground that Hannibal had married a man, but Will kinda wouldn't have been surprised if he had.

All in all, Roberto was a man who thought he was smarter than he was, that much was clear. He'd likely have floundered through life had he not managed to somehow find favour with the intelligent and classy woman that was now his wife.

Will took a breath and attempted a chuckle that fell a little flat. "Please, call me Will. We're family now."

Oh for sure this guy was a homophobe. Those words made Roberto's eyes flash with anger and repulsion. His expression betrayed him more than he realised before it settled once more. He wasn't nearly as good as Hannibal at keeping his emotions from his expression.

Roberto was about to say something when a middle aged woman appeared at Will's elbow.

"Monsieur Graham, I would be delighted to make your acquaintance." She spoke with a delicate accent and excellent English.

Will turned to her with a smile, hoping that might be cue enough for Roberto to leave, but he didn't. And when the lady realised he wasn't going to, she addressed him pleasantly too before turning back to Will.

"I have the good fortune to have known Mischa for many years. I have been her piano tutor since she was a child, and she has by far exceeded my talents now." The woman said and let out a self deprecating laugh before holding out her hand to shake. Will did so, delicately.

"Justine Bisset." She offered.

"Enchanté," Will replied with a warm smile before letting her hand go.

"She has spoken of nothing but her brother and his husband since she returned from America. I am so glad that she is going to have the opportunity to study there." She stepped a little closer, spoke a little conspiratorially as she continued, "But I must insist that you ensure she keeps up her practice. It would be a sin to waste her talent."

"Of course!" Will replied, very much enjoying the woman's demeanour and her obvious care for Mischa. "Hannibal has a piano, so she can-"

"Oh non non, Mr Graham!" The shock was affected for humour, but the call out was not. There was a teasing scold to her tone when she continued, "Doctor Lecter has a harpsichord, Mischa has already appraised me of this."

"Oh, I…" Will faltered, but then she smiled at him warmly.

"Don't worry cherie. I am about to go and accost your lovely husband to make sure that Mischa is provided for." She winked and then squeezed his arm before walking away.

In truth, Will had completely forgotten that Roberto was waiting until he turned back and there the man stood. His face was dark.

“Hannibal had told us you weren’t very sociable at large events. But you seem to be very charming when you wish to be.” Roberto growled.

And the words threw Will for a loop. Yes, he had found it easy to speak with someone who was so gracious and friendly. In an odd way Miss Bisset reminded him a little of Bev, in how she could just put people at ease with how down to earth she was.

But that didn’t seem to be what Roberto was referencing. Maybe he had it completely wrong, but was Roberto accusing him of something? Of being too friendly with a female guest?

“Let’s take a walk,” Roberto's words came out harsh but then he plastered on the most insincere smile for anyone that might be watching them. “This way my boy,” he encouraged and then started down some steps into a small courtyard at the side of the terrace.

They reached the bottom of the steps and took a few paces into the courtyard before Roberto spun back on him and narrowed his eyes.

“You think you did well for yourself, huh?” Roberto's mouth curled into a cruel smile.

“Excuse me?” Will replied, his heart in his throat. Did Roberto think that Will was actually interested in other people and using Hannibal, or was he onto them?

When Will said no more, Roberto huffed, as though expecting Will to put up more of a fight. But he had no idea what he was fighting.

“I’ve seen people like you before. Young men and women, taking advantage. I did my digging into you Mr Graham. You live in a shack, you make adequate pay I suppose, but who wouldn’t want more? And then you see your chance. You attend a group meeting and hope to meet a wealthy lover, too bereaved to see you as the trap you are.”

“What?” Will blinked, his mind reeling at the accusation. The events since he’d met Hannibal flashed before him, the external perspective and how many different ways it could all be read, if you wanted to find a certain perspective to be true.

He could see that, he could see how he might look like a gold digger. The irony was, that not only was that not the lie being told here, but the lie wasn’t even a lie. Not to Will, not anymore.

Fear washed over him and he felt his face pale. This was going to be trouble, he knew. Whatever this was that Roberto was about to accuse him of, how far he might take that. Because what if he lost Hannibal? What if it all fell apart and their arrangement became pointless.

“I love Hannibal,” Will stated. He hadn’t meant it as a response, the words had simply slipped out. He did. He dearly loved Hannibal. Was *in* love with Hannibal. That was what had made all of this so hard.

Roberto scoffed at his words, and Will felt a pain in his chest.

He wanted to run and find Hannibal right then, and-

And, what?

Declare his love to be real? He still couldn't do that, not now. If Hannibal didn't feel the same what did they do then? What would happen to Mischa?

"Have you found out yet? That you're the fool? He probably thanked his lucky stars the day he met you and saw that you could be the answer to his own problem. He needed to marry, and now here you are." Roberto chuckled again and shook his head. "You wished to play him, as you Americans say. But he played you."

"He loves me." Will protested, feeling the burn of the words in his chest. They had come so effortlessly to his mouth that he might have believed them to be true. He *wanted* to believe they were true.

"Ha! You're a bigger fool than I thought." Roberto spat the words, his lips curling into a disgusted snarl.

"I assure you, I love him." Will found the words to push back, "I don't know what I have to say to convince you… in fact, I don't even know *why* I need to convince you. We're in love, we're married, and Mischa is going to come live with us-" Will cut himself off, unsure at this point how much he should admit to knowing. So far the man didn't actually seem to think that it was a sham, but if he revealed that he knew about the contract, then that might give the game away.

Roberto chuckled and shook his head, "No my dear boy. No, that isn't going to happen."

Will grit his teeth, "That's exactly what's happening."

The way Roberto shook his head again was so casual that it was clear that he had absolute faith in his words. He was practically laughing at Will, and Will wished he could wipe the smug look from his face.

"No. There are only two realistic outcomes here. Either you confront Hannibal with what I have told you, you discover that he was using you, or he discovers you were using him. Whichever, the result is the same. Or," His eyes narrowed and his mouth pulled into a sneer, distaste clear as he continued, "You really do think you're in love, but that means nothing does it."

It wasn't a question and Will wasn't quite sure of his meaning. And then Roberto looked him up and down and practically spat his words as he continued.

"Two men really cannot love each other, this is a sham. An abomination. It cannot last, not between two men. And it really doesn't matter how long you continue to fool yourselves. Tomorrow I will be speaking to my lawyer about Mischa's future. One that will not be with two corrupting influences, two homosexuals clearly not fit to be her guardians."

Will was speechless. His eyes stung with the tears that wanted to break through. His chest pulled tight and his fists balled.

He had never actually had someone be so disgustingly homophobic to his face like this before. And what could he say in response? There was no reasoning with such opinions. Such vile anger and hatred.

"I…" Will started, his jaw flexing. He felt vulnerable, he felt violent, and he could express neither of those things as the man stood sneering at him like he was shit on his shoe.

“Will,” Hannibal’s soft voice came from behind him and Will turned to see him with such desperate relief that it took him a moment to realise Mischa stood next to him on the steps down from the terrace.

She wore the expression of someone for whom a deep seated trust and faith had been destroyed. Her eyes were red with unshed tears and she was shaking ever so slightly.

“Uncle,” She near sobbed out the word.

Will turned back to see Roberto's reddened face. He looked outraged, as though his niece and ward having heard things she was not meant to but that he dearly meant, was an injustice to him.

Will’s breathes came in ragged pants as the mixture of pain and fury raged within him. And then there was a hand on his shoulder.

“Come on, Will. I’m going to make us hotel reservations.” Hannibal said gently. He didn’t protest when Hannibal’s hand slipped into his and they walked back to Mischa. Without a word she clung to Hannibal’s other arm and they walked away from Roberto Lecter and the grand farewell party.

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

What do Will and Hannibal really mean to each other?

Will and Hannibal had packed quickly, and then Hannibal had gone to help Mischa pack a few things, leaving Will alone in their room thinking about the whole situation.

He couldn't help but feel bad about everything that had happened and his part in it. Though he had to keep reminding himself that Roberto's views were nothing to do with him, and he never actively sought to have the man spout them. That was all on him. But it didn't stop Will feeling bad about the pain it had caused Hannibal and Mischa.

They took a cab in silence as the party began to disband. A few whispers here and there as Murasaki tried to control the situation, whilst Roberto raged at the injustice of it all. It had been pretty much Will's worst nightmare as far as events were concerned. But at least Hannibal had managed to find a local hotel with a suite available - a master bedroom with an adjoining smaller room that would suit them perfectly.

Will spent the whole ride wanting to apologise but unsure how to broach it.

After they checked in and the bellhop started up to their rooms with their bags, Hannibal turned to Will and asked that he be understanding whilst he see to Mischa.

Will went from being in the room at the Lecter's overthinking the whole thing, to being in a hotel room overthinking the whole thing. Midnight came and went as he continued to fret.

All the same, Will settled in the king-sized bed and waited for Hannibal. He wasn't going to be sleeping until he came back, he was sure. And maybe not even then.

Of course, for appearances, they'd had to go for a shared room, and whilst Will understood it just felt like it was yet another difficulty to face. Maybe Hannibal wanted some time alone? Maybe he wouldn't want Will there at all, just wanting to be alone with Mischa and support her. But they had to bring Will of course.

Will tried to push all the thoughts from his mind and the lump from his throat. He knew it was his deep seated fear of rejection and abandonment. Something he'd only started to acknowledge thanks to Hannibal. But knowing that made it no easier to ignore those voices in his head.

Hannibal was quiet as he came through the door from the adjoining suite. He closed it softly and turned the key in the lock.

Will watched him and ached..

"Is she okay?" Will asked quietly, and then shook his own head, "Of course she isn't. This whole thing is so fucked up."

“It is,” Hannibal agreed as he came to the bed. He hesitated for a moment but then began to change into his pyjamas, pulling them from his case that sat on a stand at the end of the bed.

The words were cold and hard, and Will wasn’t sure if that was aimed at him so he remained silent as Hannibal dressed. Wondering what he would do next.

When he climbed into the bed next to Will, his heart lifted. Until he acknowledged that it wasn’t like there were any other options. They would be sharing a bed until their flight the day after tomorrow.

“She is as well as can be expected.” Hannibal sighed. “Her relationship with our uncle and aunt has always been strong, but not without their disagreements. This was an opinion of his, however, of which she had not been aware. To be honest, she’s much more concerned with you and I.”

“With us?” Will frowned.

Hannibal smiled softly, “Yes. She insisted I leave her now and come to you, to comfort my husband after hearing such terrible things. I fear she feels a little responsible for putting us in the situation by inviting us here, but I will relieve her of that.”

Will shook his head and let out a heavy sigh.

“I hate that she’s having to deal with this.”

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed. “And I hate that you’re having to as well, Will.”

He turned to look fully at Hannibal, shaking his head again, “We’ve been over this, stop feeling bad about the arrang-”

“Not that,” Hannibal cut him off. “If Mischa hadn’t been standing right there, I would have struck my uncle for the things he said to you.”

Will sighed again and hung his head, “Yeah, can’t say it was fun, but I’m fine.” The words choked out of him and he felt himself start to shake with all the emotions he had been holding in.

“Will, I’m sorry.” Hannibal mumbled and pulled Will into his arms. “I’m so sorry.” He kissed Will’s forehead, his hair. It felt so good, so comforting.

As the tears began to roll down Will’s cheeks he clung closer to Hannibal, wanting the support he was given but more than that. He just wanted this to be real, even if just for this moment. He needed to have a supportive husband comforting him.

“I’m sorry,” Hannibal said again. Will looked up to protest that he needed to stop saying that, but then Hannibal was kissing the tears from his cheeks. And then he was kissing his lips.

They both trembled as Hannibal pressed their mouths together, so chaste. And again. Until they were both breathing against each other. He kissed Will again and Will opened to him, sliding his arms up around Hannibal’s neck.

“Will,” Hannibal breathed his name as his arms circled Will entirely and pulled their bodies flush against each other as he slowly lowered them both to their sides.

Hannibal continued to kiss him, softer and tender. Delicate.

The kisses slowed and Hannibal pulled Will against his chest, holding him there as they breathed together. Will closed his eyes and savoured it.

“Did you mean what you said? To my uncle? Or was that part of our charade?” Hannibal’s words were a quiet rumble, as though worried he might scare Will away if he spoke any louder.

Will swallowed and took in a shaky breath, glad his face was hidden against Hannibal’s chest. “You heard what I… How long were you listening?”

“Mischa and I saw you and started down to you, not at first seeing the expressions you both wore. But about halfway down the steps your voices carried and we were able to make out the conversation.” Hannibal explained calmly before, nervously, adding, “You told him that you love me.”

“I…” Will’s mouth went dry. “We should talk about this tomorrow. Everything will seem different in the light of day.” He deflected.

“Nothing will change, Will. If that is your concern. I… I need to know.” Hannibal sounded vulnerable, pained. And Will felt his stomach swoop.

*

The feeling of Will in his arms made everything hurt a little less.

He hurt for Mischa, he hurt for Will. Though not for himself. He hadn’t been close to Roberto, and the diatribe he had let loose had not been surprising. But the two people he cared most for, the two people that were his whole world, had been hurt. And Hannibal sorely wanted to replay the event again and tear his uncle’s heart out. Not that it would accomplish anything other than make him feel momentarily better.

He wasn’t going to allow the bigoted fool to make him lose his cool. But it was a tough ask when it came to protecting Will and Mischa.

It had taken hours to settle Mischa. She had been so upset that Will had endured such a thing, and horrified that she had put him in that position. Despite Hannibal’s assurances that this wasn’t the case and that Roberto was a grown man and not her responsibility, it was obvious that she didn’t hear him.

Hannibal took little consolation in her now knowing the sort of man their uncle was. After everything she had heard.

After everything *they* had heard.

Will’s love confession rang around his mind. He knew it was nothing more than playing along. So admirably holding strong to their arrangement despite the cruel words levelled at him. But they had felt so real, so much so that it gave Hannibal pause to hope.

To allow his feelings for Will to surface anew, though he knew he shouldn’t.

And now he held Will in his arms and he had to know. Even if he made a fool of himself and everything was awkward between them again, surely it couldn’t be worse than how they had already been around each other?

“I need to know, please.” Hannibal repeated, so quietly that his words broke a little.

He felt the heavy sigh against him and dreaded what was to come next. He wanted to tighten his hold and never let Will go, but he prepared for him to pull away.

“I…” Will started and then stopped, taking another breath.

Hannibal realised Will was trembling, and he wanted to kiss him again, to reassure him. But that would be the worst thing he could do if a rejection was coming.

“Are you… in love with me?” Will asked hesitantly.

Hannibal felt like his chest was about to explode. Of course Will needed that reassurance first. All those times when he had wanted to say something about his true feelings but had not wanted to scare Will. What they must have seemed like to him. Small rejections over and over.

Hannibal’s heart broke a little at the realisation.

“Could I daily feel a stab of hunger for you? And find nourishment at the very sight of you? Yes.” Hannibal breathed the words, his heart thundering. “But do you ache for me?”

He felt Will shudder against him. Then a deep breath and Will pulled back.

Hannibal didn’t hesitate to meet his eyes, vulnerable in a way he would only ever be for Will.

Will shook again and Hannibal realised it was with a gentle chuckle, at his own expense.

Will’s eyes were warm, like the mediteranean. His smile beautiful. Hannibal was defenseless against this man who could tear him down in this moment with one word.

“You could have just said yes,” Will smiled and leaned in, brushing his lips gently against Hannibal’s.

Hannibal let out a shaky breath and felt the tears rolling down his cheeks, tasted them in his mouth as the kiss deepened.

Will pushed Hannibal back until he was laid flat against the pillows, the bed seeming bigger than it had before as Will reduced the space they were using by climbing over him.

He continued to kiss Hannibal deeply as he straddled his waist, their mutual arousal growing evident between them.

When Will pulled back to strip off his t-shirt, Hannibal said quickly, “I love you.”

Will bit his lower lip and swallowed, “I love you too.” He replied before kissing Hannibal again.

Hannibal’s hands moved over Will’s exposed flesh, wanting to touch every part of him, wanting to consume him and have him forever.

Will was even more eager, moving back again in order to pull himself out of his boxers and then Hannibal out of his pyjama pants.

Hannibal groaned and closed his eyes, head back as Will wrapped his hand around both of them and began to slowly stroke. It was torturously slow.

He practically convulsed when Will's mouth was suddenly on his throat.

"Oh, Will…" Hannibal moaned, his hips jerking slightly into Will's fist, feeling absolute ecstacy at their flesh rubbing together. His foreskin sliding back and forth ever so slightly against Will's cut cock. It was a sensation he hadn't been sure he'd ever experience, and would willingly feel every night before sleep.

"I'm sorry," Will muttered against his ear before kissing him deeply again.

Hannibal shook his head and Will nuzzled at his neck.

"There is nothing to be-"

Will thrust against Hannibal, speeding up both that and the pumping of his fist.

"I've wanted this for so long, but I couldn't… I didn't…" Will's words were desperate.

"I'm in love with you, Will." Was all Hannibal could reply.

"Oh god," Will sobbed in response and pressed their foreheads together.

"I love you, Will. I love you." Hannibal muttered over and over, unable to hold back as Will fucked their cocks together.

It was with a cry that Will came, spilling all over his hand, over Hannibal's cock and stomach.

Hannibal moved his own hand down, so close to his own release and moved Will's hand up and down twice more before he added his own seed to the mess.

Will shook, clearly struggling to hold his frame over Hannibal as he leaned down to kiss him again.

"I love you," Will said as he lowered himself down. Their release and slowly softening cocks between them as Will spread his body along the length of Hannibal's and resumed gently kissing him.

Will rocked slightly, enough to spread the slickness and bring the aftershocks of pleasure, all the while tenderly kissing Hannibal.

They fell asleep like that, bodies entwined and no care for anything but the connection between them.

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Will woke aching.

He woke in a strange position, half on top of Hannibal and slightly contorted. He was warm and clammy from the press of their flesh, and he could feel a tightness across his abdomen.

With some effort, Will rolled onto his back to look down at the dried come stuck to the light dusting of hair up to his navel.

He remembered Hannibal's declaration and felt light, happy. Had it been real?

Will frowned and considered it. The heat of the moment after everything that had happened, not just last night, but for weeks and weeks. Maybe Hannibal just thought that declaring his love was the appropriate thing to do and wasn't how he really felt. Maybe-

"Stop, Will. Whatever it is you're thinking. Whatever is making you frown." Hannibal's voice was sleep heavy and he frowned as he rolled onto his side and against Will. He took Will's chin in his hand and tilted his face to him before leaning in for a kiss.

Will let out a deep sigh and opened to Hannibal. He didn't care about his morning breath, and apparently neither did Hannibal, as they kissed deeply, languid.

They were both very clearly hard when Hannibal pulled back and gazed down at him.

"We can take this at your speed. I know we're married, but if you wish for… If you want to explore something real between us, then we don't have to be. Not in private. We can start slow, date and go from there. Just don't… Just know that I meant every word."

Will smiled, warmth spreading in his chest.

"I did too. I do, too. I didn't want to trap you into something or abandon you."

"Those were the only two options?" Hannibal teased and quirked a brow before leaning down to nuzzle at Will's chest, to lightly tongue a nipple.

Will let out a low moan and shook his head, "I thought so. I didn't think… I hoped."

Hannibal pulled back to look down at him with a very stern expression. "Will, I didn't plan this, I didn't expect it. But it is the reality between us and I need you to believe that. I never want you to have any hesitation over my feelings for you." Hannibal stopped and added gently, "But as I said, we will go as slow as you need."

"I don't want to date my husband," Will chuckled and smiled up at him, moving his own hands up, one around Hannibal's back, the other spreading into his chest hair.

At Hannibal's frown Will laughed and clarified.

"I mean, I do. But I like this… I liked our honeymoon. Can we have that, for real? Can't we just be married?"

Hannibal chuckled, "The honeymoon was real, wasn't it? Was that my wishful thinking?"

Will took in a shaky breath and on the exhale replied, "It was real. It was real for me."

That was the truth of it, even if he had tried to convince himself otherwise at the time.

"I wish I could reverse time and start this all over. Have it always be real and undoubtable."

"Don't worry about the past, please." Will's words really were a plea and he thought about Roberto and Bedelia, Randall and his dad, his mom. Everything in his life that had led him to this point. "No regrets."

“Alright,” Hannibal agreed with a sweet smile before leaning in and taking Will’s mouth again.

As he moved over Will, Will spread his legs to allow Hannibal to slot between them. The kisses became languid once more as Hannibal moved his hips. Their cocks hardened and lined up together, trapped between them as Hannibal rut.

Will whimpered soft sounds, each met with a little growl from Hannibal that might otherwise have made him laugh. But he was already so close to coming. Already so lost in the movement of their bodies together.

“I want to do this every morning,” Hannibal growled against his ear as they found a rhythm, rocking together to create the perfect friction they both needed.

“Yes, please.” Will replied breathlessly and then pulled Hannibal down into another kiss.

He pulled his legs up around Hannibal, as much as he could without altering this optimum position, but enough to hold Hannibal close to him.

Hannibal put his weight on his forearms next to Will’s head as he drove them together towards their climax.

“Let’s do this again tonight,” Will managed through thrusts that made it difficult to speak. “But with you inside me.”

“Will!” Hannibal cried out his name and then his expression tightened, his body shuddered. When his face went lax and dreamy, Will laughed.

For a moment Hannibal tried to catch his breath, and then he moved down.

Before Will had chance to react, Hannibal had taken him into his mouth and began to tease the head of his cock, tongue at his slit.

“Oh god… Hannibal, please…” Hannibal pulled off with a pop and for a moment Will thought that he was going to tease him.

Instead Hannibal sucked a finger into his mouth, lathed it up and then removed it before taking Will to the back of his throat. The sensation already made Will’s eyes roll into the back of his head, but Hannibal’s spit slicked finger sliding slowly into him had him arching off of the bed and forcing himself deeper into Hannibal and Hannibal deeper into him.

“Holy shit,” Will cried out louder than he had any intention of doing.

When Hannibal curled his finger against Will’s prostate, it was all over.

He shuddered and collapsed as he spilled hard and hot into Hannibal’s mouth. Hannibal sucking down every last drop as his finger fucked Will through his climax.

Will wasn’t entirely sure he hadn’t blacked out as silence descended between them.

Hannibal crawled back up the bed and kissed him, just enough that he could taste himself there.

He continued to pant and try to catch his breath as Hannibal swiped the corner of his own mouth with his thumb as though scooping up some spillage, and then rumbled “I think we should probably

make ourselves presentable before breakfast. The shower would adequately fit two."

Will let out a happy sigh.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

An unexpected meeting...

Will had wondered if it would be a little weird when they returned to the US, allowing themselves to actually be together rather than pretend. And with Mischa in tow too. A near constant audience. He wasn't sure how they'd be able to relax with themselves into this new, yet familiar life.

But it had actually been strangely easy. Comfortable and effortless in a way few things had been before in Will's life. Mischa fit neatly into their lives, setting her own routine so that they didn't constantly infringe upon each other. And the house was big enough for three adults to live perfectly comfortably.

It was a delight to watch Hannibal and Mischa interact and both he and Will were somewhat relieved when she decided to go to a local college. It would have been hard to have her so close and yet so far if she went out of state.

Weeks seemed to be filled with preparations and dinners. And then suddenly school was upon them.

"This weekend!" Mischa demanded with a smile as she picked her book bag up from the coffee shop table.

Will laughed and shook his head. This had become routine now, there were two days a week where the times of her classes allowed for Will to drive her to campus and get coffee with her before he had to head off to work.

The subject of conversation wasn't new either. Mischa had been bugging Will since before the semester had started, to take them out to his house and teach them to fish. Likely because she wanted the joy of seeing Hannibal in waders as much as Will did.

"I've already told you, as soon as I find a hole in my schedule to go clean the house up first. Then we'll plan it out."

Mischa let out a good natured huff as she stood. "I know what this is, Will." In her French accent it sounded all the more an accusation and he cocked a brow. "You just want to make sure it is to my brother's standard, as he will already be vexed enough by those funny trousers."

Will laughed and shook his head as she grinned. They both knew that when it came to either of them, Hannibal wasn't as fastidious as he seemed. He was sure Mischa knew as well as he did, that Hannibal would be more than happy to put up with more than a little discomfort for either of them.

"Okay, well. Time for class." Mischa leaned down and kissed both his cheeks before starting towards the door.

Will smiled as he watched her go. As usual, he had enough time for one more coffee and to go over some of his lecture notes before heading over to the Academy. The coffee shop wasn't quite on campus, but close enough to the highway for him to easily get to work.

It was nice to start the day like this. Not just to spend time with Mischa but also to ease into the day. Something he'd been discovering a lot of lately - small ways in which he could just relax more with himself. Or even better, with Hannibal too.

If someone had asked him years ago if he'd want a relationship if it meant changing his status quo, he'd have unequivocally said no. But now, in practice. Those little changes here and there, those compromises, had all been beneficial to his life. And his state of mind. Hannibal and he were, it seemed, the perfect fit.

"Will Graham, isn't it?" The light but stilted voice made Will look up.

The woman standing next to the table wore a smile but had a severe look. She was beautiful, with blond curls and expensive clothes.

She seemed vaguely familiar and a weird feeling settled in his gut.

"Yes?" He replied, eyeing her warily. He would have taken her for one of Hannibal's society friends, but there was something in the way she looked at him so intently that felt unfriendly.

She smiled at that, a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.

"I recognised you from the piece in the society pages on your engagement." She continued to smile and when he didn't reply she continued, "May I join you?"

If she was one of Hannibal's society friends she'd have been at the party, and surely a casual acquaintance wouldn't be so forward? It wasn't like there weren't other free tables she could sit at.

She clearly wanted to sit with him, but what-

Will's brain seemed to whir and click into place. Everything about the woman and the few things she had said made Will's stomach sank further.

He gave a curt nod and she slipped into the chair opposite, the one MIscha had not long vacated.

"I'm a friend of Hannibal's," She began as she signalled over to the waitstaff. "Well, more than a friend, once." She turned and looked at him. "I'm Bedelia, Bedelia Du Maurier."

Will kept all reaction from his face, thinking how proud Hannibal would be at that. But he knew that eventually he had to react.

Yes, there was part of him that he couldn't help burn with an unnecessary jealousy given that she was Hannibal's ex-wife. There was anger there too, after all, she had cheated on Hannibal and left him when he needed help. But had she not, they would never have met.

They'd have never fallen in love.

That sealed it. His slight consternation melted into a smile and he huffed a chuckle.

“Oh, I know who you are Ms Du Maurier. I believe I owe you quite a bit of thanks.” Will finally said. That easy charm that he sometimes had, when he wanted to turn it on.

Her smile wavered for just a moment and then it tightened on her face. She had expected, maybe even wanted, a different reaction. And Will couldn’t help but be glad he hadn’t given it to her.

“Hannibal’s mentioned me then?” She replied politely.

He frowned and chuckled again. “I’m sure we keep our small secrets from each other, but believe me, I’m well aware that he has an ex-wife.” Will let his tone betray how ridiculous the suggestion was.

“Oh of course, I didn’t mean to imply he’d keep such a thing from you.” She spoke slowly and deliberately, Will keeping his smile and raising a brow. Knowing that she had exactly meant to imply that.

The waiter took her order, she cleared her throat, fake smile still in place.

“I didn’t see anything about your wedding,” She looked down at his ring finger, noting the gold band. “I assume it took place.”

“Yes, it was small and quiet for the most part.” Will begrudgingly replied. He wasn’t exactly rattled, and as blasé he wanted to seem, he also didn’t want to discuss personal things with this woman.

“Hmm, yes. I’m sure.” Bedelia’s smile was almost a smirk.

“Is there something you wanted to say?” Will asked, trying to keep it polite, if only to not allow her to think she had the upper hand in any way.

“Oh, no. Not at all.” She waved the words away with her hand just as the waiter arrived with her coffee and set it in front of her.

“You’re an interesting woman, Ms Du Maurier.” Will said, considering and cocking his head. “Not many women would spot their ex's new spouse and come over to introduce themselves, much less have a coffee together. Forgive me for thinking that you had some reason for doing so.”

Her eyes narrowed, but she still kept that damn smile. He wondered if her face might crack if she lost it.

“I guess you could just say I’m curious? You did get together very quickly after our own relationship broke down.” She replied, and it felt like a dig.

“Curious, but not surprised.” Will observed.

“No. No I wasn’t.” She replied in a measured cadence.

They looked at each other for a long moment and Will felt like her eyes were boring into him.

“What is it you want?” He asked her. Tired of playing whatever game this was.

She took a sip of her coffee and looked at him over the rim of the cup. He waited patiently as she set it down and dabbed her lips with a napkin.

“As I said, I was just curious. When I heard that Hannibal was remarrying it was-”

Will cut her off, “Yes, you’re curious. Let’s not play coy.”

She narrowed her eyes at him and pursed her lips. “Perhaps more so that the new spouse was a man, but then I assume he found a way around all that.” She waved her hand dismissively.

Will shook his head, “I have no idea what you’re hoping to achieve here,” Will growled.

Bedelia frowned and relaxed back in her chair. “Sating my curiosity, then. Wondering if it was all worth it? Considering that Hannibal has gone out of his way to paint me as a villain-”

“What? No,” Will shook his head as he cut her off. He knew well enough how this had all gone down. “Anything Hannibal ever said about you was a reaction to what you had said and done. He never turned anyone away from you.”

They’d never spoken about it in depth, but enough to know that Bedelia had made it clear in their social circles that he had been the reason their marriage had broken down and she’d had to turn into another’s arms. It had taken time for some of them to realise that reality was a little different. And Will knew from Hannibal’s own admission, and the whole reason he’d been in group, was that he’d had a petty reaction. And maybe Will was bias, but in some ways that felt fair, for Hannibal to set the record straight.

And after that, their society friends had just all gravitated back to him sometime before the engagement party.

Bedelia opened her mouth to speak again but Will shook his head and began packing up his documents. “I need to get to work.”

“Hmm,” Bedelia hummed and glared at him. “Please pass on my best to Hannibal. And do let him know that I would appreciate it if he could let our acquaintances know that he bears me no ill will.”

Will blinked and then gave a curt nod. Hannibal was an honourable man, so that he was sure he’d do, whether she deserved it or not.

Will stood and shouldered his bag, and Bedelia put out her hand to shake.

He hesitated before shaking it, her smile was false as she spoke softly, “It would be a shame for the truth about Hannibal’s marriages to come out.”

She gave him a snake-like smile and drew her hand back. He blinked again, looking at her for a moment. She was clearly serious. Her status in society was obviously worth trying to ruin a man over.

Will turned and walked out before she could say anything else.

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“What is it, Will?”

Hannibal had looked up from cooking as Will walked into the kitchen. His smile faded as he saw the look of consternation on Will’s face.

Will sighed and took a seat at the counter.

Hannibal moved next to him and leaned in to press a soft kiss to his hair.

“Long day. I…”

“What is it, what’s happened?” Hannibal grew concerned and reached over to turn off the stove so he could focus on Will.

“Is Mischa here?” Will asked quietly, craning his neck to look beyond the door.

“In her room. Will?” Hannibal was more stern this time.

Will relaxed back against his frame and turned his head to press into Hannibal’s chest.

“I didn’t want to tell you until I saw you in person.” Will sucked in a breath and blew it out before continuing, “I ran into Bedelia Du Maurier this morning.”

Hannibal stiffened, only relaxing when he felt Will’s hand soothingly stroke over his arm.

“How did that come about?” There was understandable confusion in his tone.

Will moved back so he could look Hannibal in the face. “Quite by accident, I’m sure.” He’d been thinking it over all day. He could imagine she might have seen him there before and then decided to act, but he was equally sure she hadn’t purposely sought him out.

“We ran into each other at the coffee shop after Mischa left.” Will continued and noted the frown on Hannibal’s face. He was unhappy that she had been near Mischa, and Will could understand that.

“You made conversation?”

Will shook his head, “She came over to talk to me.”

They were both quiet for a moment and finally Hannibal said, “I’m guessing that it wasn’t entirely pleasant.”

Will shook his head, more dismissive than anything. “It wasn’t confrontational if that’s what you mean. Not overtly at least. Her problem wasn’t with me, of course-”

“But she did have a problem,” Hannibal growled and Will could see that he was now barely containing his anger. “I will always regret this bitterness I caused in her. But since before she left me, her actions have been her own.”

Will let out a sigh, “She feels that you damaged her standing in society, and wants you to repair that, somehow.” Will shrugged.

“Or else?” Hannibal asked, his tone cold.

“She will tell everyone about the arrangement she had with you, and her belief that we have the same arrangement.” Will surmised from what she had said, indirectly.

“I see,” Hannibal narrowed his eyes even as he looked off into the middle distance. “I don’t see how I can help her...”

They were quiet again before Hannibal’s expression turned pensive. “Mischa will soon be of age and there isn’t much my uncle can do, regardless of how he feels about her living with homosexuals. If he finds out at this point, anything he does would only hurt Mischa. I don’t think he could do that, regardless of anything else.”

“No one I know will give a damn if they found out. At worst, Bev will make jibes at me about it for the rest of my life but I can live with that.” Will added. “She might be sore at me for a few days for not having told her before.”

Hannibal nodded slowly, “I feel I have moved beyond the petty behaviour I developed before I met you. If the truth were to affect my social standing in any way, I’d manage. I find I don’t much care what anyone thinks. The important thing is that we love each other, regardless of how this all started.”

“It’s just-” Will started, but Hannibal finished.

“Mischa.”

“Yeah,” Will nodded. “I don’t think she’ll think badly of us. But I also don’t want to add to the hurt over her uncle.”

“Yes, we would have to explain everything. It would be the only fair thing to do.” Hannibal agreed. “I don’t want to break her heart over my uncle more than he already has done. But she should know the truth.”

“And she can’t find it out from anyone else. That would be… That just can’t happen.” Will spoke passionately, a tremor in his tone.

Hannibal sighed and smiled at him, pulling him back into an embrace. “My heart is warmed by how dear she is to you.”

“I think we need to tell her.” Will near whispered against Hannibal’s chest, stroking his hands up Hannibal’s back in a gesture of comfort.

Hannibal sighed against him, “I know.”

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“I am so excited!” The jubilant French accent warmed Will, even as his stomach dropped at thought of what was to come. What they had to tell her.

“Don’t get too excited,” Will forced a chuckle. “This place isn’t exactly the Ritz, and fishing is definitely not a glamorous pastime.”

“Hush,” Mischa scalded from the back of Will’s truck as they pulled onto the property. He could see in the mirror that she had moved as far to the edge of the seat as she could with the seatbelt on, looking out the windscreen between Will and Hannibal as they approached Will’s house. “It is so beautiful. How it must have been so peaceful to live here. You really must love my brother very much to leave this place.”

Both Will and Hannibal laughed fondly at that, and for a moment the task at hand was forgotten and this was the trip it was always meant to be.

Whilst Will would love nothing more than allow this to be the fun family weekend of teaching two toffs how to fish, that wasn't what it was all about.

Hannibal must have realised Will's thoughts or had the same himself, because then Will felt his comforting hand on his knee and it stayed there until they pulled up in front of the house.

Mischa was beyond complimentary when they went into the house, declaring it to be perfect and quaint. And Will had teased it might not feel so quaint when she was up to elbows in fish guts.

She'd made a face and both Hannibal and Will had laughed as they set the bags down next to the stairs.

"What is it?" Mischa asked.

Will hadn't realised that his expression had dropped, and then at her words Hannibal's grew to one of concern as they looked at each other. They hadn't meant to have the discussion so soon.

In fact, Hannibal had planned out a whole day for them the next day, which included them finally telling her over dinner. In a perfectly controlling, Hannibal way.

"Anniba?" Mischa asked, her own concern clearly growing.

Hannibal's jaw tightened and Will realised how hard this was going to be for him, so he jumped in before any answer came.

"Mischa, there's something we'd like to talk to you about." Will said, and indicated through to the dining table for them all to take a seat.

"This wasn't how I wanted to do this," Hannibal grumbled quietly to himself. At which Mischa looked all the more concerned and he took her hand.

The siblings sat together on one side of the table, Hannibal still holding her hand, and Will sat at the head.

Will had considered this over and over, he and Hannibal had discussed it at length. But in all the scenarios Hannibal had been the one to explain, and now Will realised that it just wasn't going to happen that way.

Hannibal was clearly in pain, and Will would take that emotional burden if he could.

"Please don't be concerned. Nothing is wrong, no one is sick, or… there are no problems, okay?" Will tried to reassure, pained at Mischa's expression.

She nodded, but concern etched deeper into her face and Will couldn't bear to let this drag out longer than it needed to.

"I think I should start at the beginning," It wasn't a question but he looked to Hannibal anyway, who gave a slight nod.

Will swallowed. "You know that Hannibal has wanted you to come stay for a while."

Mischa nodded, solemnly and squeezed Hannibal's hand.

"Your uncle has been trying to stand in the way of it for some time. But Hannibal knew that forcing the issue might catch you in the middle and you'd end up hurt."

Mischa frowned, "I don't understand, I am here now. My uncle-"

"He made a deal with me, Mischa. A contract that he didn't expect me to fulfill." Hannibal took over, a strain in his voice to keep the emotion at bay. "He didn't want you to come here, I have been trying to take custody of you since I was old enough to do so. But he stood in the way. I didn't want to hurt you by fighting with him, so I agreed to his terms."

"Terms? I don't understand?" Mischa didn't even have a tremble in her calm voice, though a tear silently rolled down her cheek.

"He would let you come to me if I was married and could provide a stable home life for you. I don't think he believed I would be able to provide such a thing. But I did."

Mischa looked between them and then blinked. "Bedelia?"

Will sucked in a breath and Hannibal nodded. "She was a good friend. She agreed to help."

Mischa frowned and looked between them again, trying to understand. "You… She wasn't really your wife?"

"She was, legally. But in no other way." Hannibal confirmed and Mischa shook her head in confusion.

"You lied about… I don't understand."

"I did it for you Mischa-"

"For yourself," Mischa corrected and Hannibal stopped. He looked down and then nodded.

"Yes. I suppose that is true. I just wanted you in my life in the way you should have been."

They were silent for a moment and Will didn't miss how Mischa squeezed Hannibal's hand again and didn't let it go. Her eyes went to Will.

"B-But, Will…"

Will reached for her other hand and she took it. "Bedelia decided that she needed to live her own life and then, um, we met."

Mischa sucked in a breath and looked like she was about to cry.

"Non. Non." She turned to Hannibal and spoke hurriedly, "I wasn't sad to hear about Bedelia. I never felt like she was the right person for you. And then you found WIll and I understood why she could never have been right. Am I wrong? Is this all fake?"

Now her words did tremble a little and Will's heart ached at how close they had become and how she must now feel all of that was meaningless.

“No, Mischa, no. Not with Will.” Hannibal pulled her to him and stroked her hair. “We met and we… were fond of each other. And when I knew that I still could fulfil the contract to get you here, he agreed to this pretence.”

“But it’s real!” Will chimed in. “Please believe that. I… I love your brother very much, and he loves me.”

“And we both love you darling,” Hannibal added, kissing her hair. “We wanted you to know. It was never right to keep this from you, and I hope you can forgive us.”

Mischa looked up with watery eyes, her bottom lip wobbling.

She let out a little sob. Beneath it, a small smile trying to form.

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

A second honeymoon and the happy ending.

Six Months Later

“What are you up to Katz?” Will grumbled as she looked over her coffee at him. The coffee shop was busy and he hadn’t expected Bev to join him. He wasn’t even sure she ever came here, though he knew he’d mentioned it a few times in passing. It seemed extraordinary that she’d run into him there whilst he was waiting to take Mischa home after classes.

“Nothing,” She set her cup down and picked up a spoon, beginning to stir it. Slowly.

Will narrowed his eyes. She’d been near insufferable since he told her the truth about the arrangement with Hannibal. So he had to assume this was just a new level of her teasing.

But he realised he had clearly misjudged the scale of this when Mischa walked in and bee-lined straight over. They grinned at each other like idiots and Will’s stomach sank. No good would come from these two collaborating.

“What’s going on?” Will wanted to demand, but instead the words came out laced with caution and a little fear.

“Oh nothing.” Mischa replied as she sat down and grabbed the coffee Will had ordered for her when he’d arrived.

Will huffed and waited, finally Mischa spoke conversationally as though nothing untoward.

“There has been a change of plans.” She said, very nonchalant.

“How so?” Will asked, narrowing his eyes. Although Mischa looked like butter wouldn’t melt, Bev’s grin wasn’t lost on him.

“Oh, well. I know we had planned to go to your house to fish for the week. But now we are not.” Her matter of fact tone continued and she took a sip of her coffee.

“No?”

“Non.”

“Right, does Hannibal know the trip is cancelled?” Will broached, not getting the sense that he knew anything about this. They had only been talking this morning about what a welcome break it would be to have a whole week, just the three of them relaxing.

“It isn’t cancelled,” Bev chipped in, clearly unable to help herself.

“No?” Will narrowed his eyes.

“Non.” Mischa shook her head.

Will let out a sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Okay, is one of you going to explain properly before I get-”

“Drink your coffee, Will.” Bev grinned, “We need to get going.”

By the time they left the coffee shop and got to Will’s truck, he had given up on trying to get any information from them. Or any kind of explanation as to why Bev had jumped into the passenger seat. He gave her a side glance and she just kept grinning.

That aspect, at least, seemed to become clear when they arrived at the town house to find Bev’s car parked outside.

Had she parked and then got a taxi to the coffee shop? Will was very marginally more curious than annoyed, but only by a slight amount.

When they got into the house Hannibal turned to look at them, equally perplexed by the looks of things, and he raised a brow at Bev.

“That would explain why you are parked in my driveway.” Hannibal muttered, “I had been curious.”

“Apparently, the fishing trip is cancelled.” Will spoke up before going any further. They all looked around at each other.

“I… was unaware,” Hannibal replied slowly, clearly as confused as Will.

“Look, here’s the thing.” Bev started and then turned to Mischa and said, “Cover your ears kiddo.” Which earned her a friendly glare from Mischa. When she didn’t cover her ears, Bev shrugged and continued. “It occurs to us that your honeymoon was probably pretty crap.”

Will blinked and felt his neck heat, he didn’t dare look at Hannibal, but knew he was likely trying to not show any expression at all.

“Given that it was whilst you were still faking it, we’re guessing you spent most of the time discussing how you were going to pull this off rather than…” She trailed off and then moved to put her hands over Mischa’s ears, “pulling each other off.”

“Fuck, Bev!” Will growled and Hannibal cleared his throat, though neither of them corrected her.

Mischa shrugged Bev off and dug around in her purse, “Et donc, voila!”

She pulled out an envelope and passed it to Will. Hannibal moved over to him and watched as Will pulled out the airline tickets.

“Mischa?” Hannibal asked as they looked at the two tickets to a spa resort in Niagara Falls.

“Hope you’re packed,” Bev chipped in, “because we need to leave in twenty minutes to get the flight. I’m driving.”

Will blinked.

“What… is happening?”

“You’re going on your honeymoon. A real one this time. You just need to go and fetch you bags,” Mischa chirped in excitement. “Flights, a five star resort. It looks magnifique.”

“How-” Hannibal started and Mischa interrupted.

“My credit card.” She sounded flippant but looked a little sheepish.

Hannibal’s brow raised, “The credit card I gave you…”

“Now, let’s not split hairs.” Bev interrupted. “Go and get your bags, so you can start on that honeymoon.” She winked at them and started pushing Will towards the stairs.

After a moment of hesitation, Hannibal joined him.

They were half way up the stairs, Hannibal’s hand in the small of his back, when Hannibal leaned in close and whispered, “Do you think we should avail them of the truth about our honeymoon? That it wasn’t as chaste as they beli-”

“Don’t you dare!” Will growled, his face heated and his mouth dry.

*

“Hmm, good morning,” Hannibal hummed as Will ghosted kisses over his shoulder.

“You smell like lotion,” Will chuckled against his skin and Hannibal hummed.

They had spent the day before at the complimentary spa treatments included in the package Mischa had booked. Relaxing massages before spending the rest of the day at the pool. They had fallen into bed together laughing at the thought that their first honeymoon had been as unromantic as Mischa and Bev believed.

They had spent hours taking each other apart. Loving each other so thoroughly that Hannibal now ached.

“I can shower-” Hannibal started, but Will cut him off.

“Not yet…” Will nuzzled against his back and pressed against him.

Hannibal hummed again, his breath then catching as Will started to grind his erection against Hannibal’s ass.

“Yes?” Will asked and Hannibal pushed back against him, before turning his head and offering his mouth over his shoulder.

“Yes,” He muttered as Will leaned to him and they kissed.

They remained like that for long minutes, kissing as they pressed together and Will teased him with undulating hips. He was still receptive from the night before and eager to take Will again.

When Will broke the kiss to roll back and grab the lube and condoms, Hannibal put a hand out to stop him.

“Just the lube,” Hannibal rumbled quietly.

Will looked at him and blinked, letting out a slow breath. “Yeah?”

Hannibal nodded, a smile tweaking at his lips.

They were both healthy, having been tested before their wedding and not having been with anyone but each other since before then. The only reason Hannibal hadn’t suggested it before, was down to the mess. Whether giving or receiving, his enjoyment of unprotected sex was always marred by the necessary clean up after. It wasn’t exactly the most romantic of moments.

But right then, he could imagine nothing more wonderfully intimate than having Will spill inside him.

“Please,” Hannibal encouraged and Will nodded before grabbing the lube. He poured some into his palm and stroked it up and down his cock as Hannibal lay himself out on his stomach, hiking a leg.

“Fuck, you’re so beautiful,” Will mumbled, lust filling his voice.

Hannibal simply smiled as his husband moved closer once again. Pressed against him, lying almost on top of him as he pushed inside.

They both gasped. A slight resistance, but then he gave easily as Will slowly moved forward.

Will groaned and pressed his forehead to Hannibal’s back, his whole body tense at the sensation. Hannibal resisted the urge to clench around him, deciding that might send Will over the edge.

“Hannibal,” Will moaned against his quickly dampening skin, “I love you.”

Hannibal could only let out a sound somewhere between a grunt and a hum. Tears stung the corners of his eyes as Will rocked into him.

Will panted into Hannibal’s shoulder as he picked up the pace, lying almost completely over Hannibal like a blanket but for where they were joined. His legs tense as they held his position. Each thrust pushed noises of pleasure out of Hannibal.

Hannibal’s fingers gripped tight to Will’s as Will slid his hands over the back of Hannibal’s and laced their fingers together.

The thought of Will coming inside him made it more arousing than Hannibal would have expected. And the friction of his movement against the bed beneath him made him ache. And as the friction grew, it became a little too much. Hannibal pushed his hips back, raising them enough to lessen the friction and push back into Will’s thrusts.

“Fuck,” Will muttered against his shoulder and then bit down gently.

“Will,” Hannibal gasped and pushed back a little harder.

Will grunted and began to thrust all the harder, all the faster.

“Will you come?” Will breathed against Hannibal’s ear.

“Touch me,” Hannibal replied.

He felt Will nod against him and unlace their hands so that he had all the weight on one hand and reached into the gap between Hannibal and the bed with the other. He took firm hold of Hannibal’s hard and leaking cock. When Will squeezed him, Hannibal’s whole body shook.

With a grunt, Will pushed himself as deep as he could and started to jerk Hannibal’s cock.

“Come on my dick,” Will growled, pulling a whimper from Hannibal. There was something about Will’s crassness when he was passionate that made it all the more thrilling. “Come on, darlin’”.

Hannibal clenched his muscles around Will, making it difficult for Will to pull back at all. Though he did, pushing back in through the tightness. Will groaned and shook his head.

“So tight, so good. Fuck, Hannibal. I’m going to come inside you.”

“Yes,” Hannibal breathed out his reply, “Please, Will. Please…”

“Come for me,” Will grunted again, and this time Hannibal did. His entire body clenching and shuddering as Will continued to stoke him through his climax until he was trembling and on the point of pain.

But then Will was coming too.

Will released Hannibal’s cock and clutched hold of his hip as he fucked into Hannibal a couple more times, burying himself deep as he spilled inside him.

“Will,” Hannibal gasped as Will rocked into him twice more and then collapsed on top of him. Hannibal supported them both for a moment before lowering himself back onto his belly, feeling his cooling come beneath him and the warm slide of Will’s come starting to leak out as Will slowly pulled out of him.

Will was panting as he flopped onto his back. His cock was still hard, starting to soften and coated in his own come, what little of it that wasn’t now spilling out of Hannibal. He was the perfect picture of debauchery and Hannibal couldn’t help but let out a satisfied hum.

He watched as Will caught his breath, the smile spreading over his husband’s face as he let out a soft chuckle at Hannibal’s hum.

“I think this is even better than our first honeymoon,” Will laughed.

Hannibal joined the chuckle, but was hesitant to move despite wanting to crawl into Will’s arms.

“Want me to go get a towel or something?” Will asked, concern clear.

“No,” Hannibal shook his head and moved to Will, pressing their lips together as he felt Will’s come sliding out of him. When he pulled back from the kiss he muttered against Will’s mouth, “It feels intimate in a way I’ve not really experienced before.”

Will chuckled, “Even if it’s uncomfortable.”

“It’s worth a little discomfort to feel you inside me in this way.”

“Fuck,” Will growled and kissed Hannibal again, hard and passionate. When he pulled back he grinned against Hannibal’s mouth “maybe I want you to do that to me sometime then.”

“Hmm, I’d happily oblige,” Hannibal growled and kissed Will almost savagely. They writhed together for a moment, before starting to cool. Starting to slow into a gentle kiss and soft touches until they slowly drifted off back to sleep.

*

Will wasn’t surprised to wake and hear the shower running. In fact, he’d been surprised that Hannibal had nodded back off with him rather than cleaning up there and then. And Will couldn’t deny that there was something rather satisfying about Hannibal leaking his seed.

He stretched out on the bed, feeling that ease he now had. It was hard to imagine life would ever be like this, and yet here they were, after everything.

When the water shut off Will waited patiently, a smile on his face and his dick already getting a little hard again. After all, it was their honeymoon.

Hannibal grinned as he saw Will’s prone and welcoming form before him as he came back into the room. Hannibal pulled off the towel from around his waist and began prowling towards the bed, his eyes hungry in a way that sent glorious shivers up and down Will’s spine.

“At this rate we won’t be partaking in many of the wonderful treatments the spa offers,” He scalded, to which Will just smiled wider.

“I won’t tell Mischa if you don’t.”

“Hmm,” Hannibal grinned and started to crawl up the bed, “Believe me, there are a great many things regarding this trip that I will not be discussing with my little sister.”

Will chuckled, and shook his head, reaching for Hannibal.

They both stopped at the sound of Hannibal’s phone vibrating on the vanity. They looked over at it and Will realised Hannibal must have turned it on when he got up for his shower. He wasn’t even sure where his own phone was.

Hannibal frowned but moved off the bed.

“Something wrong?” Will asked.

“I’m not expecting a call,” Hannibal replied. And Will understood. He wanted to check it wasn’t Mischa in some sort of emergency. Will very much understood that aspect of family, now. Mischa had quickly become a sister to him.

Hannibal frowned even deeper as he picked up the phone, turning back to look at Will as he answered it.

“Ms Verger,”

Will couldn't hear the other end of the conversation, but he knew that Verger was the name of Hannibal's lawyer.

Will swung around on the bed, setting his feet down but not moving further. Not wanting to intrude in whatever Hannibal was dealing with, but ready to be with him in the space of a heartbeat.

"I understand."

Hannibal's lips formed into a gentle smile and his frown eased, which allowed Will to do the same.

"Yes, of course. Well, thank you so much for your call. It is appreciated."

Hannibal rang off and swallowed.

"Is everything okay?" Will asked, still unsure whether to move or not as Hannibal stood there gazing at his phone.

"That was my lawyer. She has received a letter from my uncle's lawyer." Hannibal spoke as though he was a little bewildered.

"But, it's all over now. Mischa is here and-"

Hannibal looked up and Will stopped.

"Yes, it's rather extraordinary. The letter explained that my uncle plans to take no further action. But as you said, there isn't a lot of action he could take. Ms Verger called his lawyer and he gave a more full answer."

Will waited, realising after a moment that he was clenching his jaw. Only releasing it when Hannibal chuckled and shook his head.

"There was quite the scene at the party, at which it became clear to my aunt exactly what was happening. So she threatened to leave my uncle unless he fell in line."

"What does that mean?" Will asked, wondering if the formidable Murasaki used those exact words.

"He is now attending some sort of sensitivity and awareness training, in the hopes of mending his bigoted ways. And he has dropped plans of any sort of attempt to paint us as inappropriate guardians for Mischa."

"Wow, okay." Will laughed and scrubbed at his jaw. "I guess we'll see how that goes then."

"Yes," Hannibal hummed, "I'll not be adding him back onto the Christmas card list just yet."

Will laughed again, feeling light. Knowing that Hannibal must feel the same.

"Well," Will grinned, "Seems like there would be no need to continue our ruse now, for sure. Though I think I'm happy to keep things as they stand."

Hannibal huffed a light laugh, "I can't regret anything that led us to this point, Will. But I can regret one thing."

"Yeah?" Will asked, cocking his head.

“Yes. I can regret that when I asked you to marry me, it was not especially romantic. As I’d have liked it to have been, in hindsight.”

Will couldn’t hold back a bark of laughter. He shook his head, “Hannibal, when you proposed we were talking about an arrangement, not what this has become.”

“All the same.” Hannibal rumbled and got down on one knee.

Will chuckled again, “You can’t be serious. This is more romantic? In a hotel room that stinks of sex whilst we’re both completely naked?”

“As we’re naked it does feel like this is the most appropriate location.” Hannibal countered, with that devilish tease beneath his cool exterior. Will adored it.

“Will you do me the honour, Will,” Hannibal asked solemnly, reaching out to take Will’s hand. “Of agreeing to be my husband? To have and to hold?”

Will let out a sigh that did nothing to ease the swell in his chest.

With a smile, he took to his knees in the lush pile carpet, now face to face with Hannibal, “Till death do we part.” He replied.

Hannibal leaned in and pressed their lips together. Will didn’t hesitate in kissing him back, as though they had just taken their vows, for real this time. Because that was how it felt.

They would swap one arrangement for another. Not just the legal arrangement of marriage. It was so much more. There was no going back. They were conjoined.

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